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A review of inter-governmental cooperation and communication during Ukraine resettlement efforts in Scotland

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This briefing examines the collaboration and communication that took place between the Government of the United Kingdom, the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and Local Authorities in the implementation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. It draws together the learnings to inform the response to future migration crises that require inter-governmental cooperation.

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Executive Summary

This briefing presents the results of research into the development and implementation of the resettlement schemes in the United Kingdom for people from Ukraine following Russia's illegal invasion. The research has been undertaken by [Dr Dan Fisher from the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Glasgow](#) and has been informed by interviews with senior actors and decision-makers in the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities who were involved in the resettlement of people from Ukraine in Scotland. The views expressed in this briefing are the views of the author, not those of SPICe or the Scottish Parliament.

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces launched an illegal invasion of Ukraine. As a result of the invasion and ongoing fighting, figures from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) show that over 5 million people from Ukraine had sought refuge outside the country as of 2024.¹

Following the Russian invasion, the UK Government launched the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Ukraine Family Scheme. The Homes for Ukraine scheme (also referred to as the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme) allowed UK residents to sponsor displaced people from Ukraine to live with them while the Ukraine Family Scheme permitted Ukrainian nationals to join or stay with their relatives in the UK. A Ukraine Extension Scheme was also introduced for persons from Ukraine who held a valid UK visa on or after 1 January 2022.

The Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme, which sits within the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The Super Sponsor Scheme allowed people from Ukraine to apply for a Homes for Ukraine Scheme visa by naming the Scottish Government as their sponsor. This meant that people did not need a pre-arranged host, thereby simplifying the visa process and improving safeguarding. Under the scheme, the Scottish Government provided temporary accommodation (known as Welcome Accommodation) to people from Ukraine, followed by support to secure future housing. As it sits within the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, certain aspects of the Super Sponsor Scheme were the responsibility of the UK Government - most notably the visa approval process. Other elements of the scheme - such as the provision of Welcome Accommodation - were administered by the Scottish Government. As a result, the Super Sponsor Scheme element of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was administered differently in Scotland compared to the rest of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme is currently paused for new applications.

There were just 32 days between the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and people from Ukraine being able to apply for both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. Therefore, both schemes were developed and implemented more quickly than other comparable resettlement schemes due to time limitations. It is also worth noting that the governmental departments responsible for operating both schemes - the UK Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) and the Scottish Government's Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Directorate had not previously led on the design and implementation of refugee resettlement schemes.

This briefing offers learnings that can be gained from the implementation of both the

Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme in Scotland. It provides an in-depth analysis of the collaboration and communication that took place between the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and Local Authorities in Scotland. It has been informed by qualitative interviews with senior actors and decision-makers in the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities who were involved in the resettlement of people from Ukraine in Scotland. Conclusions drawn in this briefing are based on those interviews which were conducted on the understanding that direct quotes would be used in the briefing. The UK Government's Ministry for Local Government, Housing and Communities was directly approached for input for this briefing, however these requests for participation were refused citing resource pressures.

The use of qualitative data and direct interview quotes sets this briefing apart from a normal SPICe briefing. This approach is as a result of the briefing being the main output of a SPICe academic fellowship conducted by Dr Dan Fisher (Centre for Public Policy, University of Glasgow). Academic fellowships allow authors time to research issues in greater depth including where appropriate to undertake qualitative interviews.

The Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, 7,093 individuals arrived in the UK through visas that were sponsored by individuals or households based in Scotland.ⁱ This figure represents almost 4.3% of the total number of people resettled to the UK through sponsorship. The Scottish Government was kept abreast of the UK Government's plans, though it sought less involvement in the design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme once it had been decided that the Scottish Government would launch its own Super Sponsor Scheme.

During the design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, CoSLA interviewees described an under-utilisation by DLUHC of the existing Strategic Migration Partnerships (Local Government led partnerships that coordinate and support the delivery of asylum and refugee schemes) – although this was mitigated by the initial involvement of the Local Government Associations (LGAs). Local Authority resettlement lead officials were not included in the policy design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

At the outset, Scottish Ministers had significant concerns regarding the visa application process for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – these concerns were also expressed in an open letter co-signed by the then Scottish party leaders Nicola Sturgeon MSP (SNP), Anas Sarwar MSP (Scottish Labour Party), Patrick Harvie MSP and Lorna Slater MSP (Scottish Green Party) and Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (Liberal Democrats), which was sent to then Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP. Across the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities, interviewees were concerned with the potential for safeguarding issues to arise with the sponsorship model of refugee resettlement to be adopted by the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

Local Authority resettlement teams experienced significant challenges in implementing the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, in particular as a result of the fast pace of arrivals from Ukraine and the slow means by which data was shared with Local Authorities by the Home Office. This issue was compounded by Scottish Local Authorities' lack of access to the data management system procured by the UK Government (known as 'Foundry'), which contains case file data concerning applicants to the scheme and sponsorship arrangements. These challenges exacerbated the risk of safeguarding issues arising, as people were routinely arriving before property and disclosure checks had taken place.

CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees continue to express reservations about the temporary nature of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme's funding model, which provided Local Authorities with one year of funding per displaced person to provide wraparound support. Local Authority interviewees also expressed concern at the lack of consideration by the UK Government of the role of Local Authorities in managing hosts and engaging with local communities. Managing hosts was an aspect of refugee resettlement that had not previously been required in Scotland at such a scale – and there were challenges in managing hosts' expectations of the scheme and what housing would be available for their guests after the initial sponsorship period had ended.

Despite the concerns set out above, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was viewed positively by Local Authority interviewees as, after the scheme was fully established, it was considered less 'hands-on' than the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme (albeit with fewer

ⁱ As data is not collected on people's movements following their arrival in the UK, it is not possible to state how many displaced persons from Ukraine arrived and remained in Scotland.

people resettled per capita). In addition, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was viewed by Local Authority interviewees as being beneficial for rural areas with available jobs and sponsorship accommodation.

There was a mix of views expressed about the UK Government's communication with stakeholders in Scotland in relation to the development and operation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Following the scheme's establishment, Scottish Government respondents reported good communication with the UK Government regarding the scheme and, in particular how scheme guidance was adapted to fit Scotland-specific legislation and the Scottish context. However, CoSLA interviewees noted that they were not included in strategic discussions with the UK Government, in contrast to their involvement in other refugee resettlement schemes.

Local Authority interviewees reported limited discussion and information-sharing about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme with the UK Government. While a forum for discussing the scheme with Local Authorities was later established, this provided limited space to discuss the specificities of the scheme's implementation in Scotland. There are ongoing concerns amongst Local Authorities regarding the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme, the lack of support provided to ensure it is correctly implemented, and the potential for people's visas to expire without their knowledge and without Local Authorities' knowledge given the issues of data management and data sharing.

The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme

In total 21,702 individuals arrived in the UK through the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme (i.e. by naming the Scottish Government as their sponsor on their Homes for Ukraine visa application). This figure represents 13.1% of the total number of people resettled to the UK through sponsorship and 75% of the total number of arrivals of displaced persons from Ukraine to Scotland through sponsorship.

The Super Sponsor Scheme was originally envisaged as an approach to resettling an initial 3,000 people. It was on this basis that an agreement was reached between the Scottish Government and CoSLA for a Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. Despite this initial agreement and the inclusion of CoSLA representatives and three Local Authority Chief Executives in planning meetings, there appears to have been a lack of alignment between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities concerning key aspects of the Super Sponsor Scheme, namely; the decision not to cap the scheme and the decision to use short-term accommodation such as hotels (referred to as Welcome Accommodation) to temporarily house new arrivals until longer-term housing arrangements could be found.

It was suggested in some interviews with CoSLA and Local Authority research participants that there had been an over-estimation of the housing capacity within Scotland to support an uncapped scheme, as well as an underestimation of the resource required in the Scottish Government and Local Authority resettlement teams to manage it. When the scheme was launched, the teams within the Scottish Government's Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Directorate and CoSLA's Migration, Population and Diversity team initially consisted of a small number of people relative to the eventual scale of the Super Sponsor Scheme. Similarly, Local Authority resettlement teams would (prior to Ukraine) have consisted of a handful of people depending on the size of the Local Authority. Therefore, although there was significant experience of refugee resettlement within Scotland prior to the war in Ukraine, the initial burden of the challenge fell on a small number of people who worked long hours to deliver the scheme.

Challenges around data management and data sharing between the UK Government and the Scottish Government were significant issues in the implementation of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. The Scottish Government had limited oversight of the backlog of visa applications that the Home Office were working through once the Super Sponsor Scheme was launched. Scottish Government interviewees noted that the lack of Scottish Government oversight of visa approvals affected planning for the procurement of Welcome Accommodation. Following the establishment of the Super Sponsor Scheme, some collaborative challenges between the UK Government and the Scottish Government emerged. These centred on the funding for the scheme and the procurement of vessels M/S Ambition and M/S Victoria for use as Welcome Accommodation, where Home Office concerns regarding the visas of crew members slowed procurement.

The Super Sponsor Scheme proved to be more popular than expected and it was paused after a spike in applications in July 2022. However, even before this point was reached, Local Authorities had been calling for the scheme to be paused due to concerns regarding the number of arrivals and their capacity to deliver the scheme safely. In addition, moving people out of Welcome Accommodation became a major challenge for the scheme; as many of those arriving did not subsequently accept longer-term offers of accommodation – especially once parents had registered children in schools and adults had become locally employed. A bottleneck therefore emerged in the Welcome Accommodation which

became difficult to unpick. While some Local Authorities advocated for a firmer approach to the provision of offers of accommodation, others were concerned of a potential rise in homeless presentations occurring in areas with existing housing pressures if such offers were nevertheless refused.

Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Scotland had established an internationally renowned New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (NSRIS), which includes principles of refugee integration and working group structures around key issues such as housing, employability and welfare rights, language, and health and wellbeing. While the Strategy was considered to have been acknowledged by the Scottish Government in the planning process and throughout the evolution of the scheme's implementation, Local Authority and CoSLA interviewees expressed concern that the Strategy's principles were not being adhered to in the implementation of the Super Sponsor Scheme. These concerns centred on the incompatibility between the Strategy's principle of "integration from day one" and the fact that people resettled under the scheme were living for extended periods in temporary Welcome Accommodation. CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees also discussed how the existing NSRIS working group structures had not been adopted in the implementation of the scheme, noting challenges arising from the Scottish Government's involvement in the scheme's operational activities while overarching issues concerning the scheme remained unresolved for long periods of time.

Despite the challenges discussed in this briefing, the resettlement of people from Ukraine to Scotland was a positive demonstration of the UK Government, Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities cooperating in the face of a crisis. The Ukraine response emphasised the value of trust and regular communication between Scottish Government departments and their UK Government counterparts – especially where these departments do not routinely work together outside of crisis situations. The need to respond quickly to the war in Ukraine also provided opportunities for innovation to occur in the context of resettlement and housing. Building on this positive cooperation, this briefing offers learnings that can be gained from the implementation of both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme in Scotland.

Glossary

Afghan Citizen Resettlement Scheme (ACRS): A resettlement scheme with three pathways for at-risk individuals from Afghanistan.

Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP): The UK Government's relocation policy for former employees of the UK Government in Afghanistan.

Afghan Resettlement Local Authority Network (ARLAN): Regular forum organised by the UK Government for Local Authorities with people resettled under the Afghan schemes. Latterly used to also discuss Ukraine issues.

Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain (AUGB): Representative body for Ukrainians and those of Ukrainian descent in the UK.

Border Force: A law enforcement command within the Home Office that operates immigration and customs controls.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA): The national association of Scottish councils, acting as the voice of Scottish local government and partner in the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC): Now the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. DLUHC was responsible for administering the UK Government's Ukraine visa schemes beyond the visa application process.

Foundry Case Management System: The software tool procured by the UK Government and developed by the company Palantir. Foundry contains case file data concerning Homes for Ukraine applicants and sponsorship arrangements.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme: The main visa route for people from Ukraine administered by the UK Government. Visas were issued once a person or family had matched with a private sponsor in the UK able to provide safe housing for a minimum of six months.

JIRA Service Management System: The software tool utilised by the UK Government for councils to raise online helpdesk issues with the Foundry Case Management System.

Leave to Remain: A general term for various forms of permission to live in the UK with various rights and entitlements.

Local Government Association (LGA): The national membership body for Local Authorities in England and Wales.

New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy (NSRIS): A Scottish Government Strategy - in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities - supporting the integration of refugees, people seeking asylum and other forced migrants in Scotland.

No Recourse to Public Funds: When a person is ineligible to claim most benefits, tax credits or housing assistance paid for by the state.

Objective Connect: A secure digital workspace owned by Social Security Scotland and utilised by the Scottish Government as a means of securely sharing files.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL): A society or company that provides, constructs, improves or manages housing accommodation without seeking to profit.

Scottish Refugee Council: Scotland's national refugee charity and partner organisation in the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy.

Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme: The Super Sponsor scheme removed the need for applicants to be matched with a host before applying for a UK visa.

Strategic Migration Partnerships (SMPs): Local Government led partnerships funded by, but independent from, the Home Office. Their role is to coordinate and support delivery of national programmes in asylum and refugee schemes, as well as agreed regional and devolved migration priorities.

Surge team: An emergency response team deployed within the civil service.

Tariff funding: The UK Government committed to provide one-off funding for Local Authorities to provide wrap-around support for individuals arriving under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. Tariff funding was initially set at £10,500 for individuals arriving on or prior to the 31st of December 2022, and was reduced to £5,900 for those arriving on or after the 1st of January 2023.

UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS): Successor to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, removing the geographical limits of the scheme.

Ukraine Extension Scheme: UK Government scheme to extend the visas of people from Ukraine who were already living in the UK at the time of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine Family Scheme: UK scheme for people from Ukraine intending to join a close family member already living in the UK.

Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund (ULTRF): A Scottish Government fund established to bring back into use void accommodation of Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords for the purpose of providing accommodation for Ukrainian Displaced Persons.

Ukraine Permission Extension (UPE) scheme: A UK Government scheme for people who arrived on all the Ukraine schemes operated in the UK to extend their visas by a further 18 months.

Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS): A UK Government scheme which was established with the intention of resettling 20,000 refugees from Syria.

Warm Scots Welcome app: The digital platform designed by the Scottish Government and used by Local Authorities and the Scottish Government's surge team to match people in temporary accommodation to hosts or suitable accommodation in Scotland.

Welcome Accommodation: The temporary accommodation offered to displaced persons from Ukraine by the Scottish Government while long-term housing could be found.

Welcome Hubs: Spaces created by the Scottish Government for those arriving under the Super Sponsor Scheme where could receive advice and initial triage of requirements.

Welsh Local Government Association: The representative body of Local Government in

Wales.

1. Introduction

This briefing provides an in-depth analysis of the collaboration and communication that took place between the Government of the United Kingdom (UK), the Scottish Government the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) and Local Authorities in Scotland in the context of the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. Efforts to evacuate and resettle displaced persons from Ukraine to Scotland were designed and delivered at pace. The Ukraine schemes therefore diverged from previous refugee resettlement schemes where Local Authorities volunteered to resettle individuals and families in return for a pre-determined funding package.ⁱⁱ This briefing presents the experiences of some of those involved in this resettlement work and draws together the learnings to inform the response to future migration crises that require inter-governmental cooperation.

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces launched an illegal invasion of Ukraine. Information on the background to the conflict can be found in a previous [SPICe blog](#).² As a result of the invasion and ongoing fighting, [figures](#) from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) show that over 5 million people from Ukraine had sought refuge outside the country as of 2024.¹ Following the Russian invasion, the UK Government launched the [Homes for Ukraine scheme](#) and the [Ukraine Family Scheme](#). The Homes for Ukraine Scheme (formally referred to as the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme) allowed UK residents to sponsor displaced people from Ukraine to live with them while the Ukraine Family Scheme permitted Ukrainian nationals to join or stay with their relatives in the UK. A [Ukraine Extension scheme](#) was also introduced for persons from Ukraine who held a valid UK visa on or after January 1, 2022. Displaced persons from Ukraine sponsored by individuals in Scotland were eligible for homeless support from councils in Scotland where sponsorship breakdowns occurred or when their sponsorship came to an end.

The Scottish Government introduced the [Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme](#) to sit within the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (see Figure 1). The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme allowed people to apply for Homes for Ukraine visas without needing a pre-arranged host, thereby simplifying the visa process. Under this scheme, the Scottish Government served as the sponsor and provided temporary [Welcome Accommodation](#) to people from Ukraine, followed by support to secure future housing. The visa did not require persons to stay in Scotland for the duration of their visa and people were free to move throughout the UK though, as with the UK Homes for Ukraine Scheme, they would not have been eligible for homeless support outwith Scotland.ⁱⁱⁱ

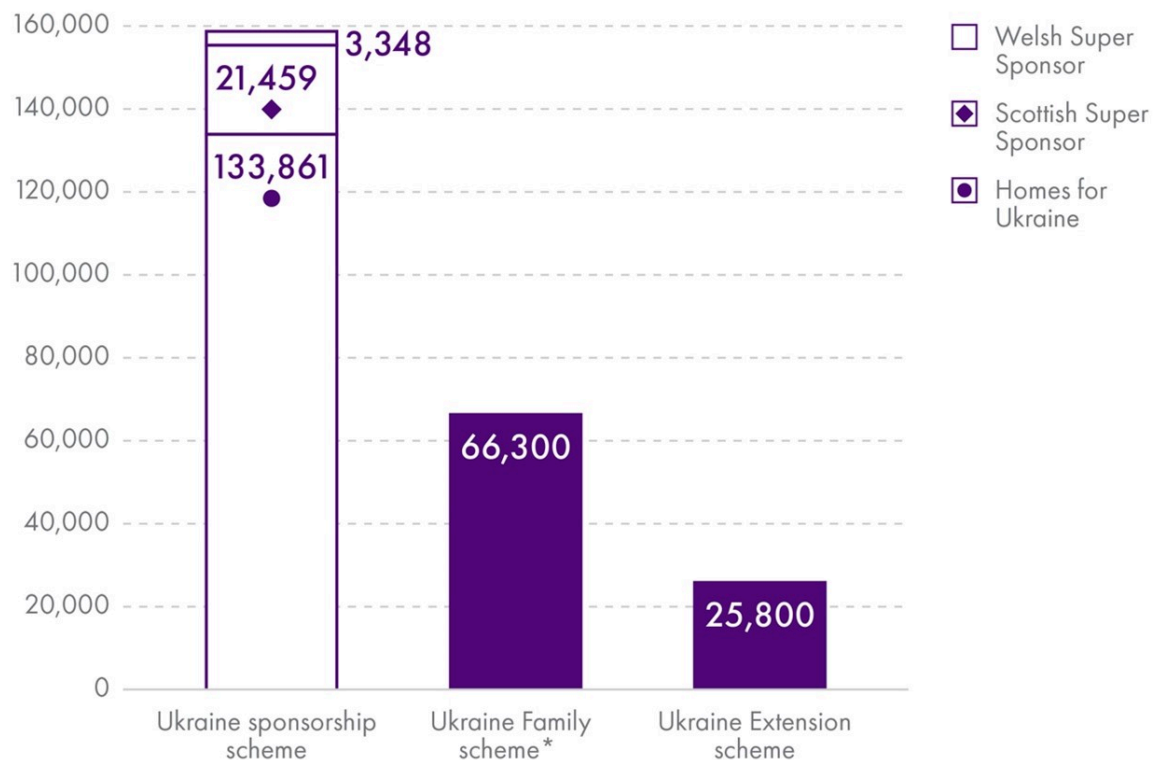
As of March 2025, 165,390 people had arrived in the UK through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (including individual sponsors and sponsorship by the Scottish and Welsh Governments). A further 66,300 people arrived in the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme and 25,800 extended their existing visas under the Ukraine Extension Scheme.³ A breakdown of the number of people that arrived through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is provided in [Section 3](#) of this briefing.

ii Under the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, for example, housing was procured prior to families' arrivals.

iii Although a person could move to a council in England, for instance, and request housing support if they had spent enough time there to create a local connection.

Figure 1: Overview of the UK's Ukraine resettlement schemes

Figure 1 provides an overview of the number of arrivals through the Ukraine resettlement schemes



*Includes 8,200 applications made by people from Ukraine already in the UK on another visa.

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Displaced persons from Ukraine therefore arrived in Scotland under all three UK Government schemes; including Homes for Ukraine Scheme visa applications where the Scottish Government acted as the sponsor. This briefing is specifically focused on the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. While the Homes for Ukraine scheme was administered by the UK Government, the Scottish Government published guidance for hosts in Scotland for both schemes and a bespoke safeguarding process for sponsorship was developed by the Scottish Government with its partners. Occasionally, people arriving under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme through private sponsorship arrangements could also be housed in Welcome Accommodation in the event of sponsorship breakdowns.

This briefing is structured into 6 Sections. The establishment and implementation of the Homes for Ukraine scheme is discussed first, followed by the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. It is important to bear in mind, however, the near-simultaneous implementation of both schemes (see Figure 2). The briefing is structured as follows:

- [Section 2](#) sets out the methodology that underpins the briefing's findings.
- [Section 3](#) provides an overview of the total number of people that arrived in the UK through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, including the number of people sponsored by the Scottish Government through the Super Sponsor Scheme. It also provides a high-level summary of the funding that was provided by the UK Government and the

Scottish Government to run both schemes.

- [Section 4](#) discusses the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Scotland and is split into three parts: i) cooperation concerning its establishment, ii) the reaction to the scheme from the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities, iii) the implementation of the scheme in Scotland, and iv) the ongoing inter-governmental collaboration that then took place.
- [Section 5](#) discusses the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme and is split into five parts: i) collaboration concerning its establishment, ii) the design of the scheme, iii) the visa processing and pause of the scheme, iv) the ongoing inter-governmental collaboration that took place, and v) the long-term challenge of moving people out of Welcome Accommodation.
- The [concluding section](#) considers the learnings that can be gained from this work.

Figure 2: Timeline of key events

Figure 2 provides a timeline of key events during the Ukraine response in Scotland

2022	14 March	UK Government launches Ukraine visa schemes
	18 March	Scottish Government launches Super Sponsor scheme
	At 12 July	20,605 Super sponsor visas issued with 5,457 arrivals. A further 2,777 arrivals in Scotland under Homes for Ukraine
	13 July	Super Sponsor scheme is paused
	26 July	M/S Victoria chartered to provide further Welcome Accommodation
	14 September	M/S Ambition chartered to provide further Welcome Accommodation
	1 November	Publication of the Scottish Government's Review of the Super Sponsor scheme with 16 interventions
	7 November	Total number of booked rooms and cabins used for Welcome Accommodation peaks at 4,535
2023	24 March	Full disembarkation of M/S Ambition
	4 July	Full disembarkation of M/S Victoria
	15 October	1,500 occupied rooms used for Welcome Accommodation
2024	January	Publication of the Move-on policy, 1,505 booked rooms and cabins used for Welcome Accommodation
	19 February	UK Government closes the Ukraine Family scheme
	16 May	UK Government closes the Ukraine Extension scheme to most new applicants
2025	27 January	350 occupied rooms used for Welcome Accommodation
	4 February	Applications open for the UK Government's Ukraine Permission Extension scheme
	As of March	1221 properties have been approved for renovation under the Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund (funding approved: £21.813m)

2. Methodology

The briefing is informed by qualitative interviews with 29 senior actors and decision-makers involved in the evacuation and resettlement of people from Ukraine to Scotland. Broken down into sub-groups; nine individuals were interviewed that could provide a perspective from the Scottish Government,^{iv} five interviews were conducted with those that could provide a perspective from CoSLA and fifteen interviews were conducted with staff from eleven Scottish Local Authorities.^v Given the need to maintain the anonymity of those interviewed, the briefing makes no distinctions between elected officials and civil servants when quoting interviewees. Similarly, no distinction is made between CoSLA staff and elected officials.

Interviews were conducted on the understanding that direct quotes would be used for this briefing. Given the complexity of the topic, many quotes were checked with interviewees to ensure the accuracy of both their statements and their interpretation by the researcher. Occasionally statements are made concerning interviewees' views without a quote being provided. This occurs where quotes would likely lead to the interviewee being recognised or where the interview was conducted without recording.

The UK Government's Ministry for Local Government, Housing and Communities was directly approached for input for this briefing, however these requests for participation were refused citing resource pressures.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview schedule which focused on the:

- Design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme
- Design of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme
- Challenges and experiences of implementation across both schemes
- Current concerns
- Lessons learned and/or lessons that respondents hoped others might learn

Recurring themes in the interviews, which are also reflected in the findings of this report, include discussions concerning data management and data sharing; the challenge of matching people in temporary accommodation to long-term housing; the vulnerability of displaced persons from Ukraine; and the novelty of not only the resettlement schemes but also of the connections that needed to be made between UK Government and Scottish Government departments, as well as between both governments' departments, CoSLA and Local Authorities.

A consistent challenge when conducting the interviews was that of maintaining a separation between the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme when discussing the implementation of both by local actors. The ways in which the schemes blended and created difficulties for Scotland's Local Authorities will be discussed, but it is important to acknowledge that research participants did occasionally struggle to separate the schemes during the interviews. A further challenge to be

iv Including, but not limited to civil servants.

v Three interviews were conducted in a group setting with multiple interviewees.

acknowledged is that of the speed at which decisions were being made at the start of the war and the time that has passed since those initial months, during which the schemes were being established.

While the briefing is intended to be a resource to capture peoples' learnings and experiences of this time, interviewees would often state that their memories were unclear regarding certain events and timelines. Interviewees were therefore not quoted on matters that they were uncertain on. In addition, this briefing teases out the discussions surrounding the establishment of both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme, and subsequent planning discussions surrounding their implementation. It is important to acknowledge that these events occurred so quickly that, for some research participants, there would be very little time between these two stages.

All interviewees have been anonymised for the purpose of this publication and quotes have been edited and/or redacted to preserve the anonymity of the speakers and, where relevant, other actors they discussed in their quotes.

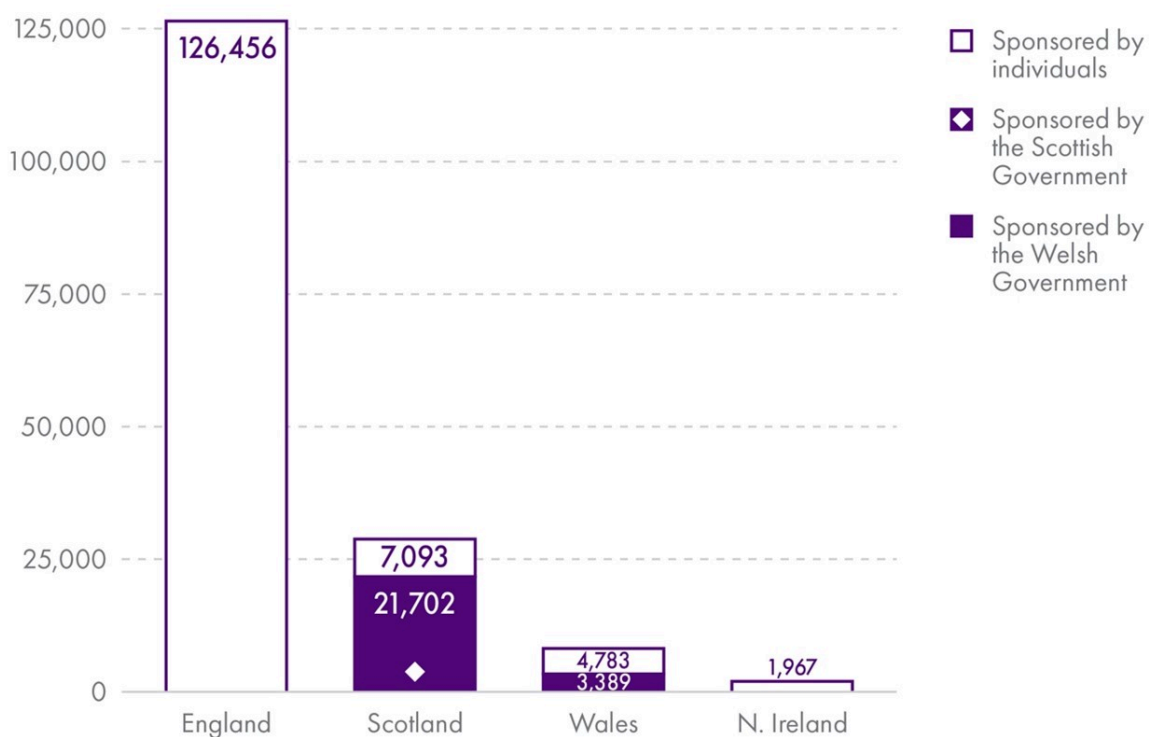
As with all briefings, there are certain limitations and elements that have fallen outwith the scope of this work. Future work will be required to capture the experiences of UK Government officials, representatives of the third sector and displaced persons from Ukraine. In addition, multiple respondents mentioned the importance of the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association in terms of complementing Scottish Government's communications with the UK Government and providing learnings for use in the Scottish context. For the most part, this is a topic that falls outwith the scope of this report, although there are occasions when these links with the Welsh experience are discussed.

3. The Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme: people resettled and funding provided

The collective efforts of governments across the UK to introduce sponsorship schemes to bring people to the UK (and of households to provide hosting arrangements) helped provide a significant number of people with a place of safety. As of March 2025, 165,390 people have arrived in the UK through sponsorship arrangements.³ As data is not collected on people's movements following their arrival in the UK, it is not possible to state how many displaced persons from Ukraine were resettled in Scotland specifically. Through sponsorship in Scotland (i.e. by combining private hosting arrangements for Homes for Ukraine visas and applications with the Scottish Government as the host), 28,795 people have arrived in the UK— representing 17.4% of the total number of arrivals through sponsorship (see Figure 3).⁴

Figure 3: Distribution of sponsorship across the four nations of the UK

Figure 3 shows the number of arrivals through the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, distributed by sponsor location within the UK. It also shows the distribution of people who arrived through individual hosting arrangements or where the Scottish or Welsh governments were listed as the sponsor.

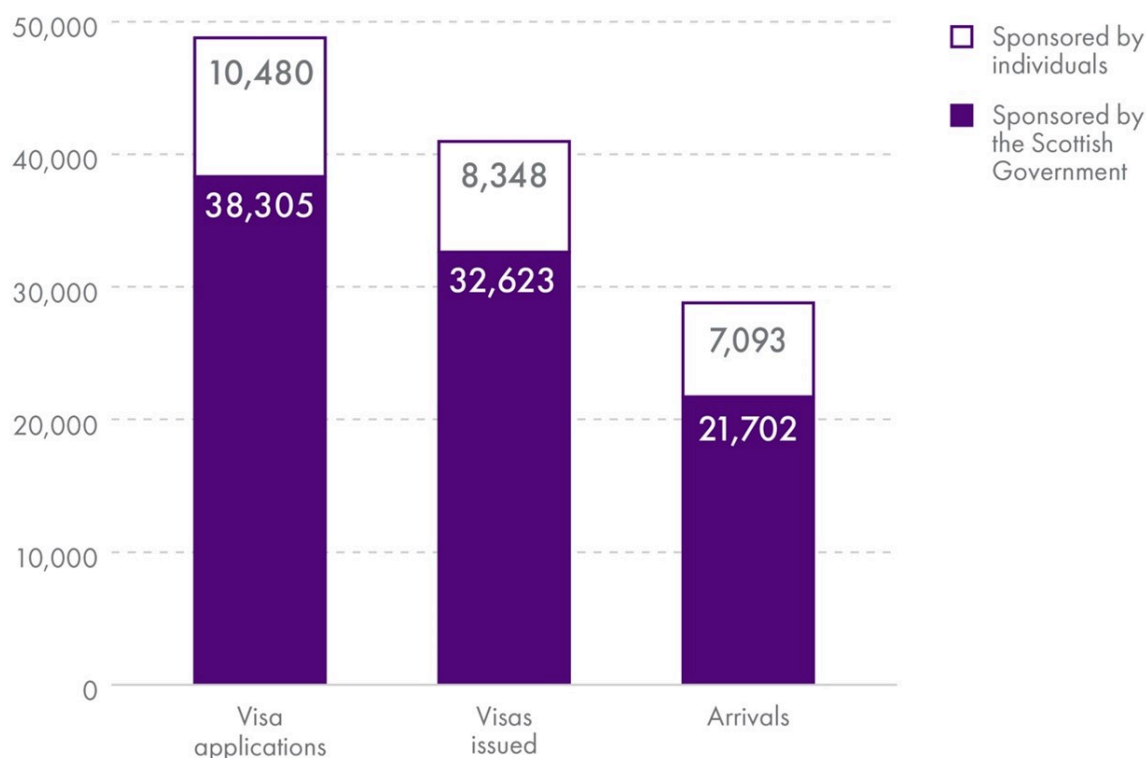


Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The Scottish Government has acted as sponsor for 21,702 displaced persons from Ukraine, which represents 75% of the total number of arrivals of people to the UK through a Scotland-based sponsorship arrangement (see Figure 4).⁴ At the time of writing, there are a further 11,164 Scottish Super Sponsor visa holders that could yet travel to Scotland.

Figure 4: Number of arrivals sponsored by individuals in Scotland and the Scottish Government

Figure 4 sets out the number of arrivals through individual sponsorship arrangements in Scotland compared to the arrivals where the Scottish Government was named as the visa sponsor. It also shows the number of applications received and visas issued.



Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

The UK Government committed to provide one year's worth of funding for Local Authorities to provide wrap-around support for individuals arriving under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (referred to as tariff funds). After discussion (see [Section 5.4](#)), it was also agreed that the UK Government would provide the same tariff funding to Local Authorities for those arriving under the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. Tariff funding was initially set at £10,500 for individuals arriving on or prior to 31 December 2022, and was reduced to £5,900 for those arriving on or after 1 January 2023.⁵

In addition to the tariff funds, hosts were given £350 per month 'thank you' payments from the UK Government as a gesture of support for providing free accommodation.^{vi} At the end of September 2023, the [National Audit Office](#) calculated that the UK Government had provided £2.1 billion in funding through tariff payments and 'thank you' payments.⁶

Data [published](#) by the Scottish Government in January 2024 show that the Scottish Government contributed £231 million to support people from Ukraine through its overarching Warm Scots Welcome programme.⁷ This included £196.9 million to fund the

^{vi} Hosts who provided accommodation for more than twelve months were given £500 per month. From 1 April 2025, these 'thank you' payments were reduced back to £350 per month

provision of free [Welcome Accommodation](#) for those arriving from Ukraine under the Super Sponsor Scheme (the Scottish Government claimed £5.5 million from the UK Government in 'thank you' payments to partially offset this cost).⁷ In addition, the Scottish Government funded third sector grants, Local Authority grants and direct running costs of the Ukraine resettlement efforts in Scotland.

Separate research is required to explore the funding that was provided as part of the sponsorship schemes in more detail. For the purposes of this briefing it is noteworthy that Local Authorities were able to use tariff funding for aspects of their work in Welcome Accommodation, yet the limiting of the tariff to one year meant that in many cases these funds had been claimed before a person on the Super Sponsor Scheme was moved to the Local Authority in which they would eventually settle. Local Authorities were also able to claim funds from the Scottish Government for their provision of support to people in Welcome Accommodation, although respondents noted that the specifics of what could be claimed for had to be discussed in retrospect.

4. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Scotland

4.1 Cooperation concerning the Homes for Ukraine scheme

On Monday 14 March 2022, the UK Government announced its Homes for Ukraine Scheme, through which households in the UK could sponsor a displaced person in Ukraine to travel to the UK. The scheme was subsequently launched on Friday 18 March 2022. Hosts would receive £350 per month in the form of ‘thank you’ payments from the UK Government, which would be administered by the Local Authority. Hosting arrangements were expected to last for at least six months. Local Authorities were initially provided with 1-year [tariff funding](#) to support their ‘wrap-around’ integration services of £10,500 (per sponsored person). This tariff was reduced to £5,900 for new arrivals from 1 January 2023 onwards.⁵

Unlike the European Union (EU), which issued a [Temporary Protection Directive](#) through which displaced persons from Ukraine could enter the EU without a visa, the UK Government’s Scheme required displaced persons to make contact with households in the UK in order to apply for a Homes for Ukraine visa. In line with the wishes of the Ukrainian Government, displaced persons from the Ukraine who were granted a visa were not granted refugee status and were initially offered three years’ Leave to Remain (LtR) in the UK.^{vii}

According to those interviewed, the Scottish Government was able to hold close conversations with the UK Government regarding the policy directions being taken by the UK Government for its Homes for Ukraine Scheme. As recollected by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“We were involved in at least some of the [early] discussions [regarding Homes for Ukraine]. From my experience, there was always a risk that conversations that were happening at a UK Government level would not be sufficiently inclusive. [...] We had been working together well all through the pandemic, so there were quite good relationships with, for example, the Cabinet Office. There were less well-developed relationships [...] with the [Home Office](#) and with [...] the [Department for Communities and Local Government](#). [...] What we did was seek to ensure very good, frequent engagement to understand the policy direction that was being taken at a UK Government level.”

Other interviewees also recalled there being good levels of communication at both the Ministerial level and between civil servants serving the Scottish and UK governments, yet recalled the fact that everyone involved was dealing with limited information. As stated by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“Nobody really knew what was happening, what would happen, what the scale of the [Russian] invasion would be, what it would mean in terms of refugees, what role we

vii The Government of Ukraine has emphasised the need for its citizens to return to Ukraine after the war to rebuild the country.⁸

would play in that. So huge levels of uncertainty throughout actually. But the channels of communication were put in place fairly early on and very quickly. And the UK Government quite quickly started talking about their Homes for Ukraine Scheme [... and] we were trying to establish information about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and what that would mean [for Scotland].”

It became clear from an early stage, however, that the Scottish Government would have the opportunity to develop its own Super Sponsor Scheme (discussed in [Section 5](#)). As a result, attention in the Scottish Government turned to the latter’s design. As mentioned by a Scottish Government source,

“In the Scottish Government we probably saw [Scottish Super Sponsorship] as sitting alongside the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and that most of our focus [...] was put into making sure the Super Sponsor Scheme worked after we had obtained, really quite rapidly, agreement from the UK Government to go ahead and do it.”

Although there were meetings between the UK Government, Scottish Government and Local Authority leads from areas where it was anticipated that most people would arrive, Scottish Local Authorities and CoSLA reported that they were not meaningfully included in discussions regarding the initial design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Local Authority interviewees reflected that this lack of consultation was not wholly unlike their existing relationship with the UK Government through the Home Office. As one source stated,

“I find that with the UK Government, they don't check in with us to say, ‘Do you agree with this, do you think this looks right?’ It's more like, ‘ This is what we're doing, you will need to come along with it.’”

Representatives of CoSLA noted a distinct lack of engagement with local government concerning the design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. They attributed this lack of engagement to the fact that the scheme was led by [DLUHC](#) instead of the [Home Office](#), which traditionally leads on refugee resettlement programmes and with whom they had existing working relationships. According to a CoSLA interviewee, the [Strategic Migration Partnerships](#) (local government led partnerships that coordinate the delivery of refugee schemes), were insufficiently included in the discussions regarding Homes for Ukraine.

“There was very little engagement with local government across the UK around Homes for Ukraine. And it was established without meaningful discussions with us [...] Part of that, I think, was because [DLUHC](#) were kind of entering a new space for themselves and they didn’t get the role of [Strategic Migration Partnerships](#) (even though they are a local government-facing department). They didn’t understand that world [of migration and resettlement]. And therefore, I think, they [...] did] their own thing and had their own ideas without tapping into the [existing] expertise that was out there.”

A key factor that the interviews have highlighted is how important trust and pre-existing relationships are to designing effective policies at speed. However, in some cases, existing relationships were nevertheless able to support the development of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, as demonstrated in the following CoSLA interview excerpt concerning discussions of the necessary disclosure checks on sponsors and environmental checks on their properties that needed to take place:

“I definitely think the local government perspective was taken on board [by the UK Government] because there were so many questions around the safeguarding and

the checking of all the homes and the hosts etc [...] The conversations where [those issues] were framed were when we sat with the other two Local Government Associations^{viii} [...] Those [meetings] were much more influential than [meetings] with the Strategic Migration Partnership leads.”

CoSLA interviewees noted the need to consider how the scheme’s implementation would differ between the four nations and how the scheme would require new teams within Local Authorities to work together. Rather than being communicated through the [Strategic Migration Partnerships](#), CoSLA research participants stated that such concerns were discussed through meetings between DLUHC, CoSLA, the [Local Government Association](#) (LGA) and the [Welsh Local Government Association](#) (WLGA). They noted that,

“The LGAs probably were really quite useful to DLUHC at that point because all three of us worked really hard to give them context and understanding - not only of Local Authority processes in all three nations - but also that kind of [local] immigration context [...] I think the biggest thing was about really knowing what was required around home checks and safeguarding and what was feasible for a Local Authority to do within the time frames. What safeguarding was it [actually] bringing? [...] which teams needed to be doing that in a local authority? Originally it had been, ‘Oh, community development workers can go out’ and it ended up being environmental health officers and social workers banding together to do that kind of work. [But] the environmental health teams and planning teams had never ever been involved in any kind of humanitarian protection work [previously].”

Across all levels of government, the response to the war in Ukraine required departments that had rarely worked together previously to quickly establish connections and trust in order to collaborate on the establishment of the UK Government’s Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The Scottish Government was kept abreast of the UK Government’s plans, though it sought less involvement in the design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme once it had been decided that the Scottish Government would launch its own scheme. At this stage, CoSLA interviewees described an under-utilisation of the Strategic Migration Partnerships by the UK Government [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#) (DLUHC) – although this was mitigated by the initial involvement of the [Local Government Associations](#) (LGAs). Local Authority resettlement lead officials were not included in the policy design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

4.2 Reaction to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

From the outset of the discussions surrounding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, Scottish Government Ministers – including the then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP – had strong reservations regarding the UK Government’s scheme. Such reservations were predominantly centred on the need for displaced persons to obtain a visa - thereby slowing the evacuation - and the need to obtain such a visa through a sponsor, which could result in safeguarding issues.^{ix} These reservations were, in part, what led to the Scottish Government developing its Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme and were published in an

viii Referring to the Local Government Association and the Welsh Local Government Association.

ix The First Minister’s concerns regarding safeguarding were discussed with interview participants.

[open letter](#) from the then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP to the then Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP.⁹ A second [open letter](#), co-signed by then party leaders Nicola Sturgeon MSP (Scottish National Party), Anas Sarwar MSP (Scottish Labour Party), Patrick Harvie MSP and Lorna Slater MSP (Scottish Green Party) and Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (Liberal Democrats), was also sent to Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP – indicating cross-party concerns regarding the need to require “people fleeing war to go through complex bureaucratic processes in order to reach safety within the UK.”¹⁰

Local Authority interviewees also had concerns regarding the UK Government’s Homes for Ukraine Scheme and potential issues around safeguarding of people arriving and living in sponsors’ homes. As one Local Authority source stated,

“When more information came out [about the fact] they were going to be paying out £350 a month [...] that sent alarm bells ringing. [...] And then [the concern was], ‘How are they going to vet this? How are they going to do the checks?’ And then it came back that we were doing the checks [laughs]. OK great, we’re doing the checks. Because the Home Office were saying that they were doing the checks on the people arriving and we were doing the checks on the people at our end. And then I thought, ‘OK, this is going to grow arms and legs.’”

Local Authorities also had other concerns regarding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme; including, the novelty of the scheme’s sponsorship model in the UK context, a perceived lack of understanding from [DLUHC](#) and civil servants being drafted into the Homes for Ukraine Scheme concerning what refugee resettlement would entail and the need to determine the role of Local Authorities in the scheme.

“There was a lot of frustration along the way with how the scheme would develop because it was new to everybody [...] and there were a lot of [UK Government] people who’d been pulled in to run Homes for Ukraine, and they’d never done anything like that before. [...] In standard resettlement procedure] we go out to the local community [...] to inform them [that], ‘We’ve got a new resettlement scheme coming to your area.’ But we weren’t in a position to do this with Homes for Ukraine. That whole element of resettlement we felt wasn’t being tapped into [...] we felt that was missing from the UK Government. They were very functional: ‘We’ve designed a scheme that brings people over [and] allows them to be safe [...] After that, it’s up to you guys. It’s up to the host.’ We were [saying], ‘That’s not enough because Local Authorities will have to be a part of this. [People] will need our support. Hosts will be coming to us for questions, hosts. So maybe clarity on our role in it we felt was being ignored.’”

CoSLA interviewees were also concerned with the Homes for Ukraine model of refugee resettlement. In particular they noted the insecurity into which hosting arrangements place people and the lack of long-term funding to support Local Authorities in the event that sponsorships fail and/or if people later rely on homeless support after the end of their sponsorship. As [referenced above](#), under the Homes for Ukraine and the Scottish Super Sponsor scheme, the UK Government provided funding for one year to Local Authorities to provide wrap-around support to individuals and families. This tariff funding was set at £10,500 for individuals arriving on or prior to the 31st of December 2022, and £5,900 for those arriving on or after the 1st of January 2023.⁵ As one CoSLA interviewee stated,

“We were concerned about the sponsorship model. We’re not saying that there isn’t a place for it, but for that to be the core model where it creates [a] kind of instability for the individuals and families concerned – as opposed to resettlement – [...] and that

remains [our] concern around Homes for Ukraine and sponsorship. [...] Ultimately, sponsorship arrangements will end and have ended. And then you hope that the majority of people have got on their feet by then and got a job and they've got their own agency and ability to find accommodation, but others don't. And, you know, they require support from local services and the third sector as well, [but] that's entirely unfunded."

It is worth noting that under standard resettlement programmes in the UK, accommodation would be sourced directly for families by Local Authorities with a longer-term funding package agreed to support integration, thereby negating the need for disclosure and property checks but also creating a more sustainable setting into which people arrive. From the perspective of Local Authorities, therefore, neither the Homes for Ukraine Scheme nor the Super Sponsor Scheme fall under the rubric of 'resettlement' as it is commonly understood in Scotland. Both schemes differ to standard resettlement due to the aforementioned lack of long-term housing, clear pathways to integration, or focus on those with the greatest need (discussed further in [Section 5](#)). Combining their thoughts regarding both schemes in this regard, one Local Authority respondent forcefully stated that,

"Neither government consulted with local authorities before launching, which infuriated us. We had to evacuate a country. I completely understand that [and] people were absolutely terrified. But we created a scheme with no humanitarian principles at its core. And we've shoehorned it into other humanitarian resettlement work. It's not the same. It's not the same for so many reasons."

While the temporary support offered by sponsors amidst the uncertainty of the war created the opportunity for thousands to be hosted, it also created the conditions in which Local Authorities feared significant numbers of homelessness presentations by people from Ukraine in the event of sponsorship breakdowns or at the end of the initial six-month sponsorships.^x It is also worth noting that, in Scotland, under the [Housing \(Scotland\) Act 1987](#), people can apply as homeless in any local authority without requiring a 'local connection'.^{11 xi} Without this need for a local connection, Local Authority interviewees in areas with already-acute housing and homeless pressures were therefore concerned that they might receive high numbers of people from Ukraine presenting as homeless at the end of their periods of sponsorship.

Interviewees noted that these concerns were somewhat alleviated in Scotland as, initially, people who had arrived through Homes for Ukraine could be placed in Welcome Accommodation (funded by the Scottish Government) in the event of sponsorship breakdowns, whereas in England such breakdowns would more likely have resulted in homeless presentations to Local Authorities. In such cases, homeless presentations would be the responsibility of Local Authorities and their existing funding.

x Concerns were also high due to the significant number of arrivals under the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme and the potential for people to present as homeless after moving out of Welcome Accommodation.

xi The rules regarding local connection were amended in November 2022 to allow people to apply as homeless to any council in Scotland.

Scottish Ministers had significant concerns regarding the visa application process for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – these concerns were expressed in an open letter co-signed by party leaders Nicola Sturgeon MSP (SNP), Anas Sarwar MSP (Scottish Labour Party), Patrick Harvie MSP and Lorna Slater MSP (Scottish Green Party) and Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP (Liberal Democrats), which was sent to then Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP. Across the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities, interviewees had been concerned with the potential for safeguarding issues to arise with the sponsorship model of refugee resettlement. CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees maintain reservations concerning the temporariness of the scheme's funding model. Local Authority interviewees expressed concern at the lack of consideration by the UK Government of the role of Local Authorities in managing hosts and engaging with local communities.

4.3 Implementing the Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Displaced people from Ukraine began arriving very quickly after the launch of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. However, Local Authority interviewees reported there being a time lag between the UK Government approving peoples' visas and Local Authorities in Scotland being able to conduct the disclosure and property checks. In part this lag was attributed by Local Authority interviewees to the fact that they did not have access to the case management system that had been [procured](#) by the UK Government for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme ¹² – Palantir's [Foundry Case Management System](#) (referred to as 'Foundry').[1]

While the UK Government opted to procure the Foundry system, the Scottish Government took a decision early on not to use it. The view from Scottish Government sources was that Foundry was under-developed and had limited functionality in relation to the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. As a result, some Scottish Government sources commented that there could have been better collaboration between the Scottish Government and the UK Government to procure a case management system that would have suited both schemes' needs.

Local Authorities in Scotland did not have direct access to Foundry in order to manage their Homes for Ukraine arrivals, meaning that a separate process had to be established for the transfer of data from the UK Government to Local Authorities in Scotland concerning Homes for Ukraine arrivals. Why Scottish Local Authorities were unable to directly access Foundry for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is a matter that would have been discussed with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had an interview been organised (see [Section 2](#)).

With Local Authorities not having direct access to Foundry, an approach was required to ensure relevant sponsorship details and visa data for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was shared with them. This information was sent by the UK Government to the Scottish Government, which then provided access to the data to Local Authorities through the Scottish Government's [Objective Connect](#) system in the form of large spreadsheets.

As will be discussed below, the view from Local Authority interviewees was that this format of transferring data significantly slowed the sharing of data by the UK Government with local authorities. While Local Authorities do have access to Foundry for the purpose of

managing cases of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Local Authority interviewees reported still not having access to Foundry for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme at the time of writing – with the consequences of this lack of access discussed in [Section 4.4](#).

In part as a result of the issues with the transfer of data, following the implementation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, Local Authorities would often only find out about a sponsoring arrangement after a person had arrived and the host made contact with them to claim their 'thank you' payments. As one Local Authority interviewee explained,

“That was a nightmare, trying to keep track of who was here. Who wasn't here. Who was still to arrive. A lot of people had guests living with them where no checks all at all had been done. They would contact us and go, 'Picked up my guest yesterday from the airport' and you're like, [...] 'Oh, really? So what's your address again?' [...] So retrospective inspections were going on - not all the time. But I mean that's still happening now, that hasn't changed. [...] Getting up to date data that we trusted [was a] big challenge, big, big challenge for us.”

In the initial period after the launch of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, therefore, Local Authorities were extremely concerned regarding safeguarding gaps despite the procedures that had been put in place. As one Local Authority source stated,

“The issue with the UK Government's [Homes for Ukraine] Scheme was that there was no safeguarding. So that absolutely concerned us. People were coming straight off planes [and] being picked up by hosts who we had neither verified (because this was happening so quickly) [nor] done the property checks [for]. We had some really dicey hosting arrangements [...] and the visas were being issued anyway, regardless of Local Authorities having the time and the information to do any of the background checks.”

Another Local Authority interviewee similarly recounted the issue of safeguarding, noting how this issue formed part of what was a frenetic period for all those involved in Ukraine resettlement.

“[Homes for Ukraine] had obviously been developed at pace. And people were arriving before the Local Authorities were fully informed. And so that added another dimension to an already frantic time.”

While respondents stated that the process of receiving information about new sponsorships improved over time, another Local Authority source noted that the issue has nevertheless persisted.

“But we are also aware – and continue to be aware – [of the fact that] there's a lot of host arrangements that you only find out about when they go wrong. No one's claiming payment, so no checks have taken place. They're privately organised on social media. You only find out when something goes wrong - and that continues to be the case.”

A further problem encountered by Local Authorities was that, when hosts did fail their checks, there was no means for them to quickly flag this issue. Instead, Local Authorities in Scotland could only use the [Jira Service Management](#) system to raise a 'ticket' to alert UK Government civil servants, but this was often too slow a means of registering an issue before people arrived. The following quote from a Local Authority interviewee highlights the sluggishness of the process as a result of Scottish Local Authorities not having access

to the data management system used by the UK Government and Local Authorities in England.

“Local Authorities in England use Foundry as their database. They can go on, they can make changes, they can add people [...] I certainly can't. [...] We had to raise a ticket with Jira to say, ‘This host has withdrawn’, for example or ‘the family are no longer coming.’ [...] We had homes and hosts that were not suitable [...] or hosts that said, ‘I was only sponsoring them. They're not coming to live here.’ [...] The first year was a nightmare with people arriving to nowhere. Because we had to raise a ticket with Jira. And Jira would take five days to come back to say, ‘What's the problem?’ Then [...] it would take another three weeks before the visa information was updated. By that time visas were being approved, people were arriving at Edinburgh Airport and I'm quite sure the Gogarburn^{xii} staff were really cheesed off because they were trying to deal with the Super Sponsorship Scheme. And [they would say] the onus [was on us]: ‘You need to find another host for them. We'll put them in a hotel just now, but you need to find another host.’ And that was really quite difficult.”

The issues discussed above regarding access to the UK Government's information management systems highlights the challenges that Scottish Local Authorities faced when trying to support the implementation of a UK Government scheme. Aside from the challenges regarding data management and the transfer of data, the above quote indicates a new aspect of resettlement that Local Authorities had hitherto not engaged with before, namely hosting arrangements. Many sponsors signed up during the initial calls for hosts and later decided to rescind their offers (for understandable reasons), but often this happened when Local Authorities contacted them to complete the required checks – thereby further stretching existing resources.

Sponsors were a key aspect of the scheme's delivery, yet there was very little time to deliver training and communicate with sponsors what the resettlement journey would look like for guests following their arrival and, importantly, what would happen following the agreed upon six months sponsorship. As a Local Authority research participant noted, this lack of information and knowledge could lead to people from Ukraine being misinformed or misguided, hosts often expected guests to find accommodation nearby following the six months.

“A lot of hosts were [staying in affluent areas...] so they would say to us, ‘But they've stayed here for six months, the kids go to school here, they've found a job here, so you'll find them a house here.’ [...] So they didn't understand how social housing worked [and] if we were offering somebody a Council house, it was like, ‘Well why has it not got carpets, why is not fully furnished? They just didn't have an understanding of what social housing was. And, you know, if you're wanting a house in [redacted affluent area], you're going to be waiting ten years for it.”

Managing hosts as well as organising the support for displaced persons resettled under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme therefore became a large aspect of the work conducted by Local Authorities. Occasionally resettlement officers could feel caught between sponsors and the UK Government, with whom sponsors had no contact. Yet Local Authority sources discussed being able to apply their existing models of integration to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

“It was fortunate in Scotland, that all 32 Local Authorities were already doing [refugee]

xii Site of the Warm Scots Welcome Hub in Edinburgh.

resettlement, and I think that's what saved the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. [The scheme] worked well in that people knew where they were going, that they were going to a sponsor - and we quickly got our head round how we were doing it [...and applied] our normal model of getting national insurance in place, benefits, bank accounts opened, GP places, schools."

Aside from concerns regarding safeguarding, the limited time period of tariff funding, and the scale of the Super Sponsor Scheme that influenced the implementation of Homes for Ukraine (discussed in [Section 5](#)), Local Authority interviewees felt that they had largely been able to cope with the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – to the extent that some were surprised by its level of success. The scheme was viewed as being particularly successful in Local Authorities with rural areas, where it benefitted local communities by plugging labour gaps. As one source stated,

"Had you told me back in March 2022, 'if they were to set up a scheme of this type, would we be able to cope?' I would have said, 'Absolutely not.' [...] I would have been too nervous about the rate of failure of sponsorship to agree that it should happen. And I was wrong about that. [Homes for Ukraine] has been really good [in our Local Authority]. So that model of sponsorship has worked really, really well. We've managed to welcome far more Ukrainians and give them a much better quality of support than I ever thought we could."

Local Authority resettlement teams experienced significant challenges in implementing the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, in particular concerning the fast pace of arrivals from Ukraine and the slow means of sharing Home Office data with Local Authorities. According to interviews with Local Authorities, this issue was compounded by their lack of access to the UK Government's Foundry data management system. The risk of safeguarding issues was therefore high, as people were routinely arriving before property and disclosure checks had taken place. Managing hosts was an aspect of refugee resettlement that had not been required in Scotland at such a scale previously and there were challenges in managing hosts' expectations concerning what housing would be available for their guests after the initial sponsorship period had ended. Nevertheless, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was viewed positively by Local Authority interviewees as, after the scheme was fully established, it was considered less 'hands-on' than the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. In addition, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was viewed by Local Authority interviewees as being beneficial for rural areas with available jobs and sponsorship accommodation.

4.4 Homes for Ukraine ongoing inter-governmental collaboration

At Ministerial level, relationships were considered to be good between the Scottish Government and the UK Government concerning the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Relationships were particularly well-established while Lord Harrington (Minister for Refugees) was in post, but then communications with the UK Government dropped off following his resignation from the temporary post after stating that his task was essentially complete (and no new Minister was appointed). Interviewees reflected on the fact that, under the 2019-2024 UK Government, inter-ministerial communication was reliant on

personal relationships rather than a systematic process. Whilst relationships were considered by interviewed stakeholders to have improved following the change of Government in Westminster after the 2024 General Election, there were still unresolved issues in terms of the development of a systematic process for inter-ministerial communication.

Beyond Ministerial meetings, Scottish Government interviewees discussed having good working relations with civil servants in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in which information and lessons could be shared concerning both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Super Sponsor Scheme. As one Scottish Government interviewee noted,

“We were having weekly meetings, which was bringing together the senior leaders for the four nations [...] to discuss what the key challenges were, funding, and how we were having people moving around the country. [...] And then we would have working groups that were kind of focused into the key things, that might be a policy area, or it might be around the kind of visa scheme itself and looking at how we were getting our data and what we needed as part of the [Super Sponsor] Scheme. So we would have that dedicated line that we could just do that with them. [...] We had common ground as to what we were trying to look at, so the communication was good. Our colleagues in Wales probably were facing more similar [situation] to what we were facing, because they were also providing [Welcome] Accommodation [...] so that brought us together even more with them. And as time went on, even increased that work of what we did around looking at housing and how we’d work together, and our Welsh colleagues came up to see what we were doing, our English colleagues came up to see what we were doing, so we kept that collaboration really going between us.”

Another important area of work where Scottish Government respondents felt there was good communication was around cooperation with the UK Government regarding its guidance for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and how this needed to be adapted to fit Scotland-specific legislation and the Scottish context.

“The collaboration [with the UK Government regarding] the Homes for Ukraine Scheme was very good because every part of the UK was doing the same thing. So we were able to share and make sure we were delivering policies that were fit for Scotland but aligned with the overall UK scheme. UK Government were good at sharing their draft guidance, they were good at sending on documentation that they were working on. So I think that side of it actually worked well. And in Scotland we were able to adapt that by working through our governance arrangements to think about what Local Authorities in Scotland needed in order to be compliant with their statutory obligations. So I think that kind of intergovernmental relations worked well and that continued.”

It is worth noting, however, that such communication channels differed from the standard communication practices for refugee resettlement – where there is a direct link between the Home Office and CoSLA. While the establishment of the Super Sponsor Scheme meant that there were bilateral discussions that needed to happen between the Scottish Government and the UK Government, the experience of CoSLA participants interviewed for this briefing was that such discussions included strategic discussions concerning the implementation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Scotland – yet those discussions took place without CoSLA, which was a source of CoSLA’s frustration with both the UK and Scottish governments. For example, CoSLA sources discussed not being involved in discussions concerning Local Authorities’ access to the UK’s [Foundry](#) system for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (see [Section 4.3](#)). As a CoSLA interviewee set out,

“In all of the other [refugee] schemes, local government in Scotland has a direct relationship with UK Government. The local government role in Homes for Ukraine was diminished anyway, just by the nature of the scheme. But the Scottish Government [...] had bilateral conversations with DLUHC in a Scottish context that didn't involve us. [...] And that, therefore, meant again that people that weren't experts in this area [of refugee resettlement], were speaking to DLUHC and projecting the view as they saw it as to what would work well with the Homes for Ukraine [Scheme in Scotland]. And we repeatedly sought to engage in that conversation in a more meaningful way, and it didn't happen.”

From the perspective of those in the Scottish Government, it was acknowledged that the communication structure was different to the asylum context. However, their view was that it was a DLUHC decision to communicate directly with the Scottish Government and that this decision was likely as a result of their challenges regarding direct communication and planning with Local Authorities in England concerning the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. As one Scottish Government interviewee stated,

“The UK Government preferred to limit their engagement to the Scottish Government [...] I think what was happening was [that] our English counterparts in the UK Government were so consumed with what they were trying to do and deliver that actually they were thinking, ‘Well if we can get the message to the Scottish Government and deal with the Scottish Government [that would be more preferable] than trying to [manage too] many stakeholders.”

CoSLA research participants did, however, also consider that their strategic involvement was less required for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – especially after its inception and the subsequent launch of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. As a CoSLA source noted,

“Local Authorities were still getting the Homes for Ukraine information that they needed to, so that didn't change. It was more [CoSLA's involvement in] the kind of policy strategic discussions that were stymied [...] Because also then at that point we were in a slightly better place with Homes for Ukraine because, whether we liked it or not, we knew what was happening.”

In addition to the lack of strategic discussions with CoSLA, the creation of the Super Sponsor Scheme alongside the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Scotland created communication issues for Local Authorities regarding [tariff funding](#) for both schemes (as both came under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme – discussed in [Section 4.2](#)). The UK Government did not initially establish a forum to which Scottish Local Authorities were invited to discuss issues or raise queries. A Local Authority source questioned whether the UK Government's expectation was that such queries could be handled by the Scottish Government, especially as guidance diverged between Scotland and the rest of the UK, and tariff funding was adapted in Scotland with the Super Sponsor Scheme. Yet Local Authority interviewees critiqued that such discussions did not take place with the Scottish Government, given its focus on the Super Sponsor Scheme (see [Section 5](#)). As one Local Authority source outlined,

“[Regarding] Homes for Ukraine, the host side^{xiii} was always brushed under the carpet by the Scottish Government as it wasn't their issue. It was never discussed. And when statistics were presented to delivery board and programme board, host numbers were never in the stats. Whereas, from a Local Authority point of view, that is probably the

xiii Referring to Homes for Ukraine sponsorship.

biggest risk to the Local Authority, is those [hosting arrangements] ending. So there was constant back and forth – and it continues to be [the case] that for some reason the host numbers were never part of the data sets. It might be that [the Scottish Government] don't have the data.”

There was understanding amongst Local Authority research participants that, outside of the Scottish context, there was less of a need for the UK Government to communicate directly with Local Authorities regarding Homes for Ukraine given the lower numbers of guests per capita. This reduced level of importance is demonstrated by the fact that Homes for Ukraine was added to an existing series of meetings concerning the Afghan resettlement schemes and other resettlement schemes (ARLAN meetings^{xiv}). Scottish Local Authorities were not initially aware of Ukraine being discussed at the ARLAN meetings, with interviewees mentioning being initially invited by Local Authority resettlement leads in England rather than the UK Government.

Interviewees found the ARLAN meetings to be a somewhat useful resource to receive updates from the UK Government regarding Ukraine visas, tariffs and as a forum to ask questions of the UK Government, but were frustrated at Ukraine resettlement frequently being an element tacked on to the final section of the meeting with time often running out before questions could be raised. Local Authority resettlement leads discussed the challenge of requesting Scotland-specific questions of the UK Government at ARLAN meetings, which are intended to be focused on the UK as a whole. For example, Local Authorities with large numbers of persons in Welcome Accommodation discussed the challenge of raising specific questions with the UK Government concerning how they could spend tariff funding. Meanwhile only one Local Authority team discussed having utilised contacts in the Scotland Office to communicate with the UK Government regarding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

There were also frustrations amongst Local Authority interviewees regarding the UK Government's process for handling the extension of people's visas for another 18 months (through the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme) with limited opportunities for Local Authorities to provide input. Instead, interviewees spoke of their frustration at the process going live without them having seen the full guidance, the lack of clarity regarding the amount of support Local Authorities are permitted to give to people completing the extension form, the lack of a third party engaged to support the submission of extension forms,^{xv} and the limited time permitted to apply for the extension and concerns regarding unforeseen issues leading to people potentially losing their right to public funds (NRPF).^{xvi} On ensuring that all visa holders apply for the extension scheme, one Local Authority source stated,

“[Visa holders] were supposed to have applied by the 31st of December 2024. So, the date of your visa expiry will be on your e-visa. But that is really putting the onus entirely on the guest to check that, to apply within the window, you know. But there are a lot of potential issues around that. Some of our guests don't even speak English well enough to be able to read an application. [...] So there is potential for issues around that with the short window. And there's also some stipulations that if you've been out

xiv Afghan Resettlement Local Authority Network

xv For previous e-visa extensions under the Syrian VPRS, Citizens Advice Bureau had been engaged to support people to complete the forms.

xvi Interviews were being conducted as the Extension Scheme was being launched, therefore it is unknown whether any of these concerns have yet been realised.

of the UK for a certain period of time [that the extension might not be granted]. But they have not stated what time period is acceptable.”

Regarding the risk of Ukrainians losing their right to public funds and whether or not Local Authorities should assist them with the forms, another Local Authority source remarked,

“We should not be giving immigration advice, but we will need to get involved [with the Extension Scheme applications] to a certain extent because it's in our interests [...] We have put a lot of Ukrainians in tenancies. If they don't do their application right, they could fall into [risk of having] [NRPF](#), and then they have no way of paying the tenancy, you know. And then, we end up with a whole pile of rent arrears on all the [Registered Social Landlord](#) properties [...] and then people will] maybe have to claim asylum.”

The issues recounted in this section again point to the challenges being experienced by Local Authorities as a result of issues of data sharing between Scottish Local Authorities and the UK Government. While the UK Government's [Foundry](#) system records the date of people's original Homes for Ukraine application, for example, Scottish Local Authorities will not be able to see this unless they recorded it when the person originally arrived. At the time of writing, Local Authorities similarly do not have exact visa data for those on the Super Sponsor Scheme either, meaning that there is uncertainty concerning when displaced people from Ukraine living in their authority will need to apply for the extension.

A wider issue discussed was the perceived siloed approach in the UK Government concerning the broader challenge of forced migration and resettlement, highlighted by the creation of multiple resettlement schemes with different funding instructions, rights and responsibilities for Local Authorities. The multiple Ukraine schemes added to the many existing forced migration schemes and routes that operate in the UK. As a CoSLA interviewee stated,

“[In 2022] you would have still had Syrian [[Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme](#)] money, you would have had [UK Resettlement Scheme](#) money, you would have had [Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy](#) money, you would have had [Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme](#) money, you would have had unaccompanied asylum seeking children money (and depending on which route they came through depends on what money you got), and then you had Ukraine money. And again, there were two routes. And then there was a whole bunch of people that didn't come through any route, you know, that they were here on student visas, family visas, work visas all of that. So even though there were [funding] instructions, the whole landscape around this - and it still remains today - is that there are different funding instructions for each scheme. [...] From a Local Authority point of view, you're presented with a human being that has needs [...] And because there was such uncertainty about the funding for such a long time around the Super Sponsorship Scheme, I think that just added to the mess that people were feeling.”

Concerning just the Ukraine schemes, these were themselves complicated to administer and often required Local Authorities to use funds from elsewhere to support people. As one Local Authority source explained,

“Throughout this whole process, I think one key thing for me is that everything was looked at in silos. So we were dealing with Afghan arrivals. We were also dealing with Ukraine arrivals on two different routes and a family route (which is seldom mentioned). For the family route arrivals we didn't have to do vetting, but they often

came to us because they needed school places and [help to be registered with] GPs [...] so they still needed wrap-around support [...] We also had a fair few [Ukrainians] in a neighbouring authority that were here on work visas that got transferred to the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. [...] If people found accommodation here and moved into it and they didn't have a bed, you know, we would use our funding [to support them].”

In addition to there being a perceived siloed approach by the UK Government concerning the establishment of different schemes, there was a perception amongst research participants that there was a lack of willingness in the UK Government to consider the effect of the Super Sponsor Scheme on asylum dispersal in Scotland. In one example, a Local Authority was contacted by the Home Office concerning the procurement of a hotel for asylum dispersal after it had already been contacted by the Scottish Government concerning the same hotel for Welcome Accommodation for the Super Sponsor Scheme. Scottish Government interviewees also reflected that there was limited communication with them concerning the overall landscape of forced migration in Scotland and that Local Authorities with significant numbers of people in [Welcome Accommodation](#) were still being expected to provide large numbers of beds under asylum dispersal. As one Scottish Government interviewee stated,

“Understanding that it’s an interactive landscape is important. I think [the UK Government] don’t always get that, they don’t get the fact that it works together in a community way [... For example], we were running a Super Sponsor Scheme and we were providing a really good response as our part share of the UK’s [overall response to the war in Ukraine]. But at the same time, at a UK level, [the UK Government] were making decisions about asylum seekers and were expecting things of the same councils that were providing [assistance] for us. [...] And it was like, ‘Can you not see? A bit of a conversation with us might have helped to see the pressure they are already under and that what [you are] doing is not going to help. Because you’re coming at them for [asylum], and they’re already helping in Scotland with us to host things [for the Super Sponsor Scheme].’ So I think that’s a bit of trying to understand the landscape [which was lacking].”

Following the Homes for Ukraine Scheme's establishment, Scottish Government respondents reported good communication with the UK Government regarding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and how guidance needed to be adapted to fit Scotland-specific legislation and the Scottish context. However, some interviewees considered that there was a perceived siloed approach concerning the UK Government's overall management of forced migration in the UK. Interviewees noted a lack of willingness by the UK Home Office, for instance, to consider Ukraine arrivals in its overall aims of securing hotel accommodation for people seeking asylum.

The governance and communication structures that are usually applied to UK Government resettlement schemes were not utilised in the implementation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, with CoSLA noting a lack of strategic cooperation with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities on the operation of the scheme. Local Authority interviewees reported limited discussion and information-sharing about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme with the UK Government. While a forum for discussing the scheme was later established, this provided limited space to discuss the specificities of the scheme's implementation in Scotland. There are ongoing concerns amongst Local Authorities regarding the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme, the lack of support provided to ensure it is correctly implemented, and the potential for people to be missed given issues of data management and data sharing.

5. The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme

5.1 Establishing the Super Sponsor Scheme

On 11 March 2022, then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP co-wrote an [open letter](#) with her counterpart in Wales, Mark Drakeford MS, to the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove MP, outlining a 'super-sponsor' proposal to support displaced persons from Ukraine.¹³ The letter set out their plan for the Scottish Government to sponsor 3,000 persons and for the Welsh Government to sponsor 1,000 persons in an initial tranche. In addition, the letter stated that, for the schemes to work, "it is imperative that our Governments have full access to data on Scottish and Welsh offers of accommodation in your proposed digital portal and we will then assume responsibility for matching refugees to accommodation, including public sector, private sector and voluntary sector accommodation." In a [statement](#) to the Scottish Parliament on 15 March 2022, the First Minister announced that a proposal in principle had been reached with the UK Government which would "allow Scotland to welcome 3,000 Ukrainians very soon."¹⁴

This agreement was reached following discussions between then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP, then Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP, then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove MP, then UK Minister of State for Refugees Lord Harrington, then Scottish Government's Minister with Special Responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine Neil Gray MSP, and senior civil servants of both Governments. According to Scottish Government interviewees, personal working relationships between key Ministerial and civil service actors played an important part in both the establishment and subsequent implementation of the Super Sponsor Scheme.^{xvii}

The Covid-19 experience had shown that it was possible to reach intergovernmental agreement very rapidly between the Scottish Government and the UK Government concerning divergent approaches to a crisis. In addition, the Scottish Government had previously established positive working relationships with CoSLA, Local Authorities and third sector organisations working in the area of refugee integration through the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#). These circumstances, combined with the need created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, affirmed in Ministers' minds the necessity and feasibility of running a Scotland-level scheme. As one Scottish Government interviewee reflected,

"[Setting up the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme] was an extraordinarily rapid piece of decision making. [...The Scottish Government] had got very used to making extraordinarily rapid decisions because COVID demanded that of you. [...] There were relationships and channels in place that allowed us to do things faster. Because we'd had to do that for COVID and, yes, we were able to draw on that for Ukraine."

Another Scottish Government interviewee similarly noted the exceptionally short timescales involved in the scheme's establishment and how, as a result, standard risk procedures could not be followed. They noted that,

"[The Scottish Government] had not had an opportunity to do all of [its] due diligence around the scheme and how it would operate. There was incredibly rapid work being done in real time. What we had was Government Ministers wanting a generous

xvii It was noted that structural channels would have been too slow to respond to the crisis in time.

Scottish response, worrying that Homes for Ukraine was too restrictive.”

Though it is ultimately not what transpired, respondents also noted that early discussions with the UK Government concerned the possibility of large organisations and networks coming together to sponsor people arriving from Ukraine to sit alongside the sponsorship models developed by the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government. Another Scottish Government source noted that,

“The thinking at that time was that there would be lots of organisational sponsors. [The UK Government were saying you] might have a third sector charity next to the Scottish Government, next to the Welsh Government and that that would be the way that they would organise it. But I think over time [...] that ambition was not as they had envisaged. [...But] it was definitely the UK Government’s vision at that time that there would be multiple organisations that were sponsoring.”

Although Scottish Government Ministers were reluctant to cap the Super Sponsor Scheme, the original figure of 3,000 persons to be sponsored was broadly based on the number of people who had been resettled to Scotland under the [Syrian Vulnerable Persons Scheme](#) (VPRS). These discussions were recounted by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“We had a number of conversations at a senior level about the idea of [...] the Syrian Resettlement Scheme in Scotland, [which] was seen as enormously successful [...] and obviously we had the New Scots [Refugee Integration] Strategy. We are a small country, we’re able to wrap our arms around people, we’re able to work in a slightly more fleet of foot way. And the emerging view was, well maybe we could do something that looked a bit like the Syrian Resettlement Scheme [...] that] as a starting point would maybe be about three thousand refugees.”

Another Scottish Government interviewee acknowledged that the initial target of 3,000 persons was based on the proportionate share of arrivals under the Syrian scheme, but they also noted that the number was based on the expected number of arrivals from Ukraine to the UK under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. They stated that,

“The three thousand [number] was based on our proportionate share of arrivals in the Syrian scheme, and what our expectation would be of our proportionate share of arrivals into the UK [from Ukraine]. And we wanted to at least get to that point. [...] That was what we were saying we would expect to be a proportionate share.”

The reasons for the eventual discrepancy between the stated 3,000 persons and the eventual 21,459 persons resettled under the Super Sponsor Scheme will be discussed in [Section 5.3](#). Yet it is important to note here the issue of data and the unpredictability of the situation as it was developing in Ukraine. Both the UK Government and the Scottish Government were designing schemes as the war was unfolding without knowledge of the duration of the war.

A crucial aspect of the Super Sponsor Scheme, from Scottish Ministers’ perspectives, was the need for the scheme to be made accessible to displaced people from Ukraine alongside, and preferably within, the UK’s overall sponsorship model – later termed the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. The route adopted was to make the Scottish scheme accessible as a choice in a drop-down menu for applicants using the UK Government’s Homes for Ukraine web portal. As discussed with a Scottish Government research participant, this was seen as crucial for both ensuring ease of access for displaced people

from Ukraine to the scheme, but also as a means of communicating to the actors that would be involved in implementing the Super Sponsor Scheme that this was a pan-Scotland initiative. Significant levels of political and institutional trust were therefore required to achieve the interoperability between the Scottish Government and the UK Government's visa scheme design and application process within a matter of days. As a Scottish Government interviewee stated,

“What the UK Government [...] did was it trusted the Scottish Government's technical people with back door entrance to the Home Office systems so that they could see and comment on the building of the system in real time as it was happening. That's astonishing given the kind of walled garden of government security and how sensitive immigration systems are. That was a big thing for the UK Government to have done.”

Prior to seeking agreement from the UK Government concerning a bespoke Scottish scheme, the Scottish Government engaged with CoSLA to seek their support, in principle, for a scheme similar in size to the aforementioned Syrian scheme and with the eventual aim of moving many of those resettled into refurbished council and [Registered Social Landlords](#)' housing. As stated by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“It was really important that we knew CoSLA were on board in principle with [the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme] as an approach and an idea before we proposed it to Michael Gove. So there was rapid work in the first few weeks with the UK Government to understand what they were proposing [and] with policy officials and senior leaders in Scotland to understand what we felt about that. [...] I think most Scottish stakeholders had real concerns about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and there was a kind of groundswell of opinion that this wasn't something we felt we could support. So then we were looking at what would we do and it was very important that, before the First Minister proposed [the Scottish Super Sponsorship Scheme to the UK Government], we were clear that CoSLA were on board as the local government representative body. And indeed we'd exchanged wording [along the lines of], 'Up to three thousand in the first instance' was what we had proposed with CoSLA. So that felt quite important.”

The desire to have local government and third sector organisations on board with the initial plans at the outset of the establishment of the scheme is also noted in the following statement by another Scottish Government research participant,

“Quite early on we had pulled together CoSLA, all the councils,[...the] Scottish Refugee Council and other third sector organisations – and it felt as though the Scottish approach would be under the umbrella of the Scottish Government as a kind of corporate sponsor. And that we would then work with all our partners to [...provide] accommodation, food, healthcare, clothes [etc...] The actual visa really didn't differentiate much under the Scottish offer, and I think that's where the Cabinet Minister [Neil Gray MSP] was really clear that it was Scotland's scheme.”

The above quote also highlights Ministers' vision for the Super Sponsor scheme to be a Scotland-level scheme – with the Scottish Government convening a national response while providing temporary Welcome Accommodation to fit the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship requirements – rather than a scheme over which the Scottish Government had full ownership.

There is agreement from CoSLA interviewees concerning the request from the Scottish Government for their endorsement of the scheme in principle, which followed a call with

local government political leaders. One research participant stated that,

“[We were told] that the First Minister [Nicola Sturgeon MSP] wanted to pitch for a Scotland specific scheme [...] We quickly pulled together a set of our political leaders, that afternoon, and said, ‘This is what is potentially coming forward.’ So [...] we were able to go back [to the Scottish Government] and say, ‘Yes, absolutely, local government are willing to lean in and support resettlement. [Though I was reminded of the fact that] it took us three years to resettle [2,000]^{xviii} Syrians. But I suppose, coming out of the pandemic, and the scale of the challenges [that] we’d been dealing with, probably, three thousand people did not seem [...] like such a huge number.”

The above quote again highlights the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on how decision-makers approached the scale of the task of resettling people from Ukraine. Despite agreement from CoSLA that local government would support the scheme, there were also then-stated concerns to the Scottish Government regarding both the proposed number of people to be resettled through the Super Sponsor Scheme and the fact that, unlike the [Syrian Resettlement Scheme](#), agreement was being sought from CoSLA without time for it to seek full approval from councils or ascertain their housing capacity. These concerns were noted by a CoSLA source,

“[The Scottish Government] asked us how many people we thought Scottish Local Authorities could accommodate, which made me really uncomfortable because there was not [time for] due process [to be followed] in terms of having had conversations with the Local Authorities and ultimately, all of the work that we have done historically, you need to have a political mandate as well. [...] Whereas the questions that were being asked of us were like, ‘Right, we need to know now because we want to say something publicly about what our role is.’

In addition to their concerns regarding the lack of time to scope housing capacity, CoSLA research participants also stated their concerns regarding both the use of hotel accommodation and the Scottish Government’s decision not to cap the Super Sponsor Scheme. These views were gained in part from CoSLA’s experience with the UK Government’s [Afghan resettlement schemes](#), where the UK Government struggled to encourage Afghan families to accept long-term housing, with families instead becoming stuck in temporary ‘bridging accommodation’. A CoSLA source recounted that,

“[The Scottish Government] were the hosts, but they were wanting Local Authorities to place people [into accommodation] and do the integration and support work. On the surface that all sounded fine. They took our views on everything and anything. [...] That is really great that they did that. Except they ignored it all. Every single thing that I think we ever said to them... We’d just come out of the utter chaos that was Afghan [resettlement] hotels at that point [under the UK Government scheme]. And I remember [...] repeatedly saying that they needed to put a cap on the number of people that were coming, even if they lifted that cap at a future point, but let’s do this in stages because you cannot have everybody arrive at once. And do not go into hotels. You need to manage this so that you do not go into hotels.”

While some Scottish Government interviewees refuted being told not to use hotels (this discrepancy may also reflect the timing and attendance of meetings), the above quote does also demonstrate some divergence of views between Scottish Government and

xviii Amended to provide a more accurate number and date. In December 2017, Scotland [celebrated](#) resettling its 2000th Syrian refugee under the Syrian VPRS. ¹⁵

CoSLA research participants. As stated by the CoSLA representative above, there was also the view amongst some of those involved from CoSLA and Local Authorities that the Super Sponsor Scheme could be capped (as it was in Wales), to then be potentially reopened. Meanwhile, Scottish Ministers were primarily concerned with removing visa restrictions. Similarly, some of the Local Authority interviewees questioned whether the Super Sponsor Scheme should have been designed to provide welcome to those with most need – thereby operating more similarly to previous schemes and complementing the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme was originally envisaged as an approach to sponsoring an initial 3,000 people, with potentially other institutions also committing to sponsor people. While the Scottish Government reached agreement with CoSLA concerning the possibility of launching a scheme, there were concerns communicated to the Scottish Government by CoSLA at the outset regarding the use of temporary Welcome Accommodation and the need for a cap on visa numbers.

5.2 Designing the Super Sponsor Scheme

[Section 5.1](#) discussed how the Scottish Government had sought agreement from CoSLA and local government leaders before discussing the Super Sponsor Scheme with the UK Government and launching the scheme. This section considers the inter-governmental collaboration that then took place to implement the scheme. What should again be emphasised is the speed at which the scheme was established and the lack of oversight that the Scottish Government had regarding the processing of visas – albeit that Ministers were committed to an uncapped scheme with minimal visa restrictions. It is also important to note that, due to the fast pace of events, the Super Sponsor Scheme was designed and retrofitted as events unfolded.

When the Super Sponsor Scheme was launched, the team within the Scottish Government's Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Directorate responsible for the scheme comprised only a handful of people who at that time were working towards the publication of the third iteration of the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#). Similarly, CoSLA's Migration, Population and Diversity team was also comprised of a small number of people, while Local Authority resettlement teams would (prior to Ukraine) have also often been the responsibility of one or two people depending on the size of the Local Authority. Therefore, although there was significant experience of refugee resettlement within Scotland prior to the war in Ukraine, CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees also considered there to have been an over-estimation of capacity available (and of the ability to adjust capacity) to meet the demand of the scale of arrivals under the Super Sponsor Scheme.

In the first six months of the Super Sponsor Scheme, when the need was greatest, resourcing and ensuring staff wellbeing was a huge challenge for the Scottish

Government.^{xix} Internal calls were made for secondments to the team working on the Super Sponsor Scheme; with hundreds of civil servants becoming either temporarily

xix Some respondents stated that the Scottish Government had been too slow to recognise the scale of the Super Sponsor Scheme – and that it would have been advantageous to put the team working on the scheme on an enduring footing earlier.

involved, or joining the Ukraine Directorate after it was established. Yet, prior to the establishment of the Ukraine Directorate and its firmer structures, civil servant secondments could be for very short periods of time (respondents mentioned people being seconded for “weeks”). As a result, Scottish Government respondents discussed spending a significant amount of time focusing on recruitment, retraining people and coping with the loss of corporate knowledge - all of which reduced capacity to work on the overarching policy at a time when there were real concerns regarding securing enough Welcome Accommodation for new arrivals.

In response to the launching of the Super Sponsor Scheme, the Scottish Government enacted a Gold-Silver-Bronze hierarchical governance framework – a commonly-used management structure in the context of responding to major incidents. In this structure Gold has strategic oversight and decision-making responsibilities, Silver plans and manages tactical operations and Bronze conducts and manages on-the-ground activities (which, concerning Ukraine, was focused on the Welcome Hubs and Welcome Accommodation). CoSLA was represented at each of the command structure levels. Local Authorities were additionally represented by the Chief Executives of Edinburgh City Council, Glasgow City Council and Aberdeenshire Council (as then-Chair of [Solace Scotland](#)) at Gold meetings. Local Authority resettlement teams were represented at Silver and Bronze meetings.

As with their connections with the UK Government, Scottish Government interviewees noted their positive working relationships with their counterparts in CoSLA and Local Authorities – having been strengthened by the collaborative working during the Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking positively of the involvement of CoSLA and Local Authorities, the following extract from a CoSLA source reflects on the good partnership working concerning the establishment of specific safeguarding procedures for the operation of the schemes in Scotland. In addition to noting the time pressures involved in the coordination of the efforts, the quote also highlights how, despite the schemes being separate, intertwining was occurring at times between the UK and Scottish schemes in terms of how they were managed at local and national scales. They stated that,

“[Planning] was very much done in collaboration, to an extent, but it was going that fast, that it was difficult to go out and [for example] take a straw poll of 60 people in local government. Because it was [a case of], ‘Right we need a safeguarding policy, what does that need to look like? Because people are now arriving at Edinburgh Airport, and they’re being picked up by sponsors and they’re going to go and live in these people’s houses [...] And I think there was a genuine attempt to bring colleagues together [...] There were Council Chief Execs that were involved [and] were lots of people that were coming together [around the issue of safeguarding].”

Scottish Government research participants had mostly positive reflections of the Government’s collaborative working with CoSLA and Local Authorities, although interviewees did also discuss the need to learn how to delegate more responsibility to Local Authorities in future emergency responses. Despite their involvement throughout the Gold-Silver-Bronze response structure, however, Local Authority research participants were more critical of the extent to which their expertise regarding communities and refugee resettlement had been included in the planning and design of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. Referring to the planning meetings, one Local Authority interviewee reflected that,

“It was not a decision-making place. I went in as though I was being consulted or advised on issues which Ministers had already decided [on], or were going to decide

anyway [...] So you always felt as though it was primarily a consultation mechanism, as opposed to [it being a case of us] all being in this together round the table making joint and shared decisions. It wasn't that. [The Scottish Government] were saying, 'We have decided this, we are doing it, just telling you.' Or, 'We are thinking of doing this, what do you reckon?'"

One of the frustrations communicated by Local Authorities during the research interviews was the perceived incompatibility between the Super Sponsor Scheme and the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#), which is based on a partnership between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and the [Scottish Refugee Council](#) (SRC). This partnership has its own governance structures, in which the Scottish Government plays a key role in the design of the policy and the long-term enactment of the strategy, but not necessarily in the operationalisation of the policy in day-to-day terms which, is primarily the remit of Local Authority resettlement teams and third sector organisations. As a CoSLA interviewee stated, however, the leads of such resettlement teams were not, in their view, sufficiently included in the planning and implementation of the Super Sponsor Scheme.

"I remember having discussions about the New Scots Strategy and [the response from the Scottish Government being], 'Oh well, that's very interesting [...] but we're not going to use New Scots structures for this, we need to set up command structures [...] It felt that we were being carried along by all of this momentum that was being generated by the Scottish Government [...] And I remember hugely challenging meetings where we were saying, 'You need to bring in resettlement leads.' [...] but they weren't being listened to. Resettlement leads were not being listened to in what they were advising on how things should take place."

This viewpoint was shared by Local Authority participants, who critiqued the lack of consideration regarding the housing capacity in Scotland to welcome an uncapped number of arrivals, the lack of capacity in Local Authorities to support the number of people arriving, as well as the capacity and experience of the Scottish Government to lead on such a large scheme. These views are summarised in the following Local Authority quote,

"The Scottish Government Super Sponsorship Scheme, before being put on pause, had issued [20,605]^{xx} visas with no discussion with local government about our capacity [...] There was a lack of any engagement from Scottish Government officials with local government and resettlement leads who knew their areas and how to do their jobs. We needed operational guidance that could clarify what the Scottish Government was looking to achieve. But there wasn't the capacity and experience to design the key elements of the policy and the operational guidance in a way that met the diversity of Local Authorities across Scotland."

One of the key principles of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy is that of 'integration from day one of arrival', which is predominantly used in the context of people seeking asylum in Scotland. In the context of Ukraine, however, this principle can be seen to have taken on two different meanings. For the Scottish Government it was about, as one interviewee put it,

"How do you make sure you're treating a large number of arrivals with dignity and respect and give them a basic level of humanitarian protection and security in terms of their health and their accommodation and their food."

xx Number amended to match the number of Scottish Super sponsor visas approved on 12 July 2022. ⁴

Whereas for CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees,^{xxi} the strategy and its principles were more about ensuring peoples' swift placement into long-term accommodation and integration into local communities. This difference is played out in the planning around the use and location of Welcome Accommodation, peoples' short and long-term housing needs, and how people will likely act once they are placed in temporary accommodation. As stated by a CoSLA source,

“[In the Syrian scheme in 2015], people were quickly dispersed to different parts of the country, rather than “warehoused” in a particular geography. [...] Local Authorities were saying, ‘You need to get people moved around the country really quickly.’ [...] Whereas] I think there was a particular view [from the Scottish Government] that we need to set up a Welcome Hub in Edinburgh and that’s going to be our base. I think those decisions were made without reference to the expertise in the Local Authorities as to an approach. [...] Likewise around the procurement of hotels. Again, I remember there was a squad of civil servants who were basically on procurement. They were working with their provider [...] and] they were just left, right and centre procuring these hotels, without [...] apparently questioning], ‘How is this all going to join together?’”

The urgent need to procure Welcome Accommodation is discussed in Section 5.3. In reference to the UK Government’s Afghan resettlement schemes, however, Local Authority interviewees also recalled warning the Scottish Government that temporarily housing people in Welcome Accommodation would involve long-term integration challenges.

“At the very early stages [...] meetings were taking place with Scottish Government [and] they were looking at [the use of] hotels [...] So they were looking at a three or four day turn around with people being in a hotel on arrival for a few days and then going into host arrangements [...] This will be minuted in many meetings, but the view from [Local Authorities...] was, ‘Not a chance. Not a chance that is going to happen in that quick a time frame.’ [We discussed Afghan resettlement with the Scottish Government and] said, ‘In those circumstances it was [already] very difficult [to ensure onward movement from hotels]. And that’s when accommodation has been planned pre-arrival. What we’re doing here is we don’t know who’s arriving until they arrive. [...] It’s not as simple as finding [accommodation], there are things we have to do operationally before people can progress. And then very, very quickly the numbers skyrocketed.’”

Despite the involvement of CoSLA and Local Authorities in the governance structures of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme, Local Authority interviews indicated strong disagreement concerning the management of the scheme. It is worth noting there was also strong disagreement between Local Authority resettlement teams and the UK Government concerning the temporary nature of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the lack of safeguarding (see [Section 4.2](#)). However, a key difference with the Super Sponsor Scheme was the extent to which it relied on Local Authorities for the day-to-day management of the Welcome Accommodation that was being procured, and the need for collaboration with the Scottish Government in the national process of then matching people in hotels to other accommodation. As a result, and although there was funding provided through both the UK Government’s tariffs and Scottish Government funding (see [Section 4.2](#)), Local Authority resettlement leads described being 'blind-sided' and 'bombed' while working on the scheme. As one Local Authority source stated,

xxi To be sure, the Homes for Ukraine Scheme with its temporary placement of people in sponsorship accommodation also does not align with the principle of ‘integration from day one of arrival’.

“The Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme, I just feel that we were blind-sided by that one. [We were not] expecting it at all. I think the Scottish Government basically just told us that they were doing it and that we were helping [...] They did it to us, they didn't really involve us.”

There appears to have been a lack of alignment between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities concerning key aspects of the Super Sponsor Scheme, namely; the decision not to cap the scheme and the use of Welcome Accommodation. Prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Scotland had established an internationally-renowned New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy, which includes principles of refugee integration and working group structures around key issues such as housing, employability and welfare rights, language, and health and wellbeing. Although CoSLA and Local Authorities were represented in the governance structure of the Super Sponsor Scheme, CoSLA interviewees critiqued the decision not to use the existing governance structures of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy. As a result, the design of the scheme was viewed as having lacked significant input from those with the most experience in the sector, including Local Authority resettlement leads.

While the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy was seen to have been acknowledged by the Scottish Government in the planning process and throughout the evolution of the scheme's implementation, Local Authority and CoSLA, interviewees expressed concern that the Strategy's principles were not being adhered to in the implementation of the scheme. There was comment in some interviews that there had been an over-estimation of the housing capacity within Scotland to support an uncapped scheme, as well as an underestimation of the resource required in the Scottish Government and Local Authority resettlement teams to manage it.

5.3 Visa processing - and pause of the scheme

One of the main challenges of Ukraine resettlement (under both schemes) was the lack of information concerning who the people were that would be coming and when they would be arriving. Under other resettlement schemes that operate in Scotland, the UK Government typically provides information concerning those being resettled to CoSLA – who then communicates the information out to the relevant Local Authorities wherein people will be resettled. Such information would include, for example: who is coming, what are their needs, are their extended family members likely to come, where are they now and when will they be traveling, if they are indeed going to travel? One of the main challenges encountered regarding the issuing of visas under the Ukraine schemes was that often people did not travel (due to, for instance, finding an alternative place of safety). As a result, it is important to bear in mind the lack of available data that governments were working with at this time.

In [Section 5.1](#) it was noted that the IT team at the Scottish Government was given an unusual amount of access to the Home Office's visa system. According to a Scottish Government interviewee, the Scottish Government had asked for the ability to include flags in the system to alert those overseeing visa processing when particular numbers of visa applications under the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme had been reached. They stated that,

“[We] wanted the opportunity for Ministers to press pause on the system. [We said to] the system’s architects, ‘How are these data going to flow and when do we need the flag to go up?’ [so that we could] work out when do we think the 3000th person is going to apply so that, if we need to close the system to new applications, we know to do it then [and] not when they’ve been accepted because then there’s a whole queue.”

Following the launch of the Super Sponsor Scheme, Scottish Government officials were in contact with their counterparts in the Home Office concerning the number of visa applications being received. In the initial weeks after the launch, however, there was concern that not enough visas were being approved given the urgency of the need for evacuation. As was recounted by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“We had very significant issues around delays on the part of the [Home Office](#) in processing visas. That was a matter of real concern between Ministers. [...] Ministers were basically challenging their UK counterparts saying, ‘Come on, get a move on! We know people are applying for this scheme, but they are caught up in the visa process at the Home Office level.’ What we then saw was a commitment on the part of the Home Office that was delivered to massively speed up the approval process.”

Despite involvement in establishing the IT processes of the overall Homes for Ukraine Scheme and how the Super Sponsor Scheme would sit within the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, Scottish Government officials were not granted access to the visa data being received and processed by the [Home Office](#) for some time, which made planning incredibly difficult. Scottish Government interviewees reflected on the challenges that UK colleagues in the Home Office were experiencing regarding the need to swiftly introduce and implement a new visa scheme. The result, however, was that the Scottish Government did not receive data on the number of visas being applied for when the scheme was launched. The Scottish Government was advised of visas which had been approved after several weeks, along with information from [UK Border Force](#) on arrivals. By approximately May 2022, the Home Office had put in place its processing arrangements and [surge team](#) and Scottish Government officials could then see the backlog of applications that had been received by the Home Office. As a result, Scottish Government interviewees discussed being unable to have an overview of the visa data or model visa processing to adjust planning for new arrivals.

“It was still a UK [visa] system that was being used. We were still reliant on UK data coming through to us [...] that was a problem, particularly in the early days [of the scheme]. We were not getting live access to data to be able to plan for what was coming.”

Another Scottish Government source similarly recounted that, while data was an issue for both governments, those working on the Super Sponsor Scheme in the Scottish Government could only view the number of visas being granted by the Home Office.

“Data was a challenge for all of us [i.e. both the Scottish Government and the UK Government]. But because the Super Sponsor Scheme was just a bit different [...] We were looking at numbers of visas approved, which were low because the Home Office hadn’t got its surge team in place [yet...] So we were planning on the basis of visas approved. We should have been planning on the basis of visas applied for. [...] We didn’t have the data to build up our analytical capacity, so we weren’t all over the data in a way you would normally be in a government programme like this and able to take those kinds of decisions.”

As with the general challenge of accessing timely and accurate data in the implementation of both schemes, the above quotes demonstrate the complexity of the challenge at hand for the Scottish Government as it sought to implement a bespoke scheme within the UK Government's existing (albeit new) Homes for Ukraine Scheme without full oversight and control over the visa processing. While Scottish Government interviewees positively noted the support that had been made available to displaced persons from Ukraine through the Super Sponsor Scheme, they also noted the need to have more cooperation and control over data if a similar scheme were to be run again in the future. As one Scottish Government interviewee stated,

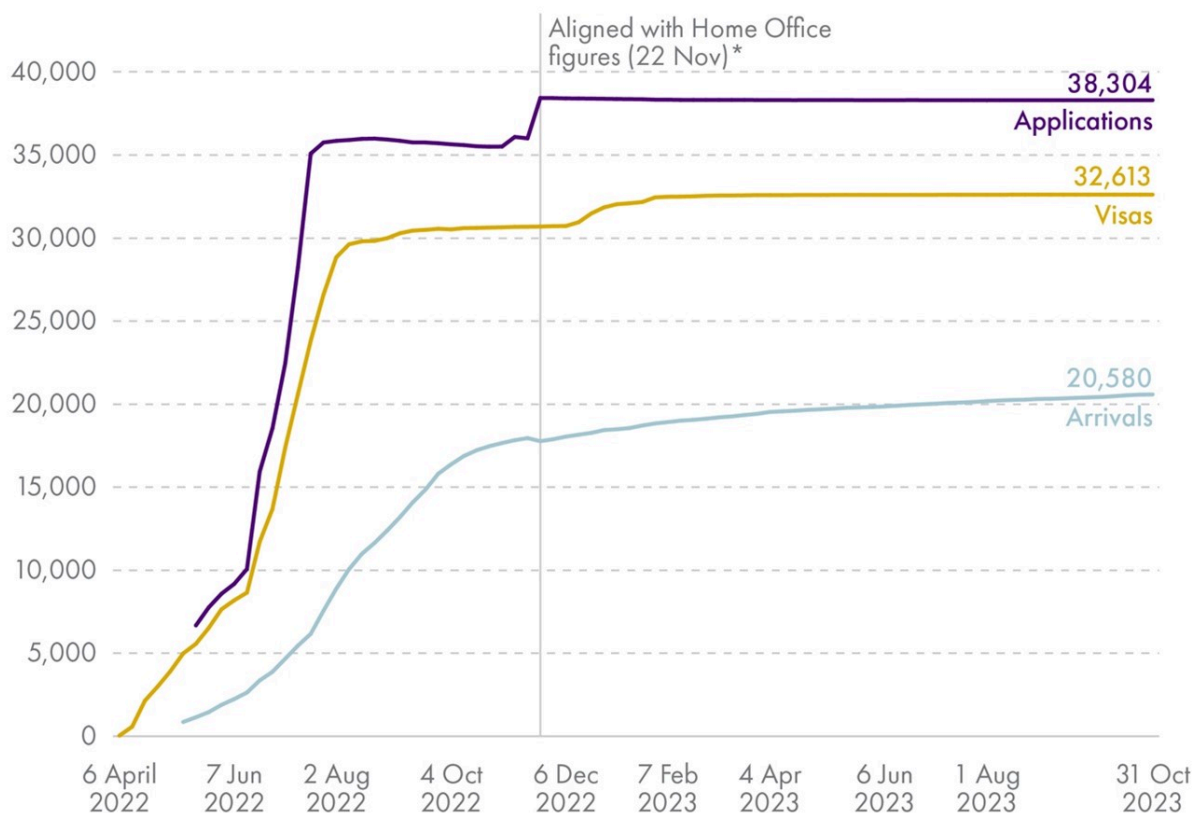
"Had we had better data and better information [then] I think the planning and delivery and execution of the [Super Sponsor] Scheme would have been very different. But you can only do what you can do with the information you have at the time. [...] I think if we could have all shared and collaborated much more from the start, then I think that would really have helped."

Due to the limited oversight of the data, the Super Sponsor Scheme quickly surpassed its initial aim of sponsoring three thousand persons such that by June of 2022, 8,647 visa applications had been approved – with 2,631 people having arrived (see Figure 5).⁴ Planning for arrivals was also made more complicated by the slow transfer of data between the Home Office and the Scottish Government. This was discussed by a Scottish Government interviewee in the context of the triaging and contact with new arrivals.

"When [the system] worked well, [if] the Scottish Government had been selected from the dropdown menu [...] we would automatically [transfer the] file to our international call centre [who would] make contact with that person and talk about their needs (did they have special health requirements) and when did they expect to arrive. [...] So that's when it worked really well, but it took some time to get to that smooth stage of operations. [Whereas] in the early days, it was file transfers of spreadsheets in a slightly clunky fashion."

Figure 5: Number of Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme visa applications, approvals and arrivals

Figure 5 shows the number of Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme visa applications, approvals and arrivals over time.



*From 22 Nov 2022, total visa application submitted and visa application confirmed figures were amended to include applications which have since been withdrawn or refused, in order to align with Home Office reporting. Any increase in the figures is not an indication of a surge in new applications.

Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Displaced persons from Ukraine could make their own way to Scotland from anywhere in the world. Though this meant that flights did not need to be chartered, it meant that people could be arriving at any time and at variable rates at the Welcome Hubs that had been established. Recollecting the challenge of arrivals, a Scottish Government interviewee stated that,

“The key priority was to provide a safe haven because one of the challenges was [that people from Ukraine] were not coming on flights that were dedicated, [i.e.] just coming as a Ukraine flight. So they were coming at different times of the day, different times during the week. We were having to manage all the flights for people coming in, to see when they were coming. [Part of the Scottish Government’s role was] about leading and working with Local Authorities, and third sector organisations, to be able to provide that response once people landed in the country.”

Interviews with Local Authority research participants highlighted frustrations at hotels being procured across the country, sometimes with very limited warning. While initially discussions took place to identify suitable hotels, the pressure of new arrivals and inability to view visa processing data meant that there was limited planning that could take place regarding the opening of Welcome Accommodation. As stated by a Scottish Government

interviewee,

“Officials had rather fraught conversations with Local Authority partners around where the capacity was going to be. We had [procured] in advance a significant level of hotel accommodation. And so we knew where our capacity was likely to be, but until we got access to the data in terms of how many people were coming, whether they were coming with a dedicated host, or whether they were coming as part of the Super Sponsor Scheme, it was difficult for us to be able to manage as to where the capacity was going to be placed.”

A further limiting factor to the planning of where temporary Welcome Accommodation could be opened was that the Scottish Government had made the decision to provide three meals per day to those in temporary accommodation. In addition, in the early months of the scheme whole hotels were procured through the Scottish Government’s contractor (rather than individual rooms) and the decision was made to locate hotels close to public transport links and services. As one Scottish Government interviewee stated,

“During those early months of the scheme [...] we were providing the meals. So because of that [...] you could not [have], like you see with some temporary accommodations, where you can have a microwave in the room. We could not do anything like that, we needed to be able to provide people with their hot meals that they needed. That was one of the key criteria [for the Welcome Accommodation]. Then we would look at [procuring hotels] close to links for public transport, trying to think about being able to give people access to schools [and] things like that.”

During the Spring of 2022, Scottish Government interviewees described the Ukraine response to be akin to that of the Covid-19 pandemic; with officials working round the clock to ensure sufficient provision of temporary accommodation. Multiple interviewees discussed their fears of not having enough Welcome Accommodation for new arrivals and planning contingency accommodation in sports halls, caravan parks or using tents. Recounting this time, one Scottish Government interviewee discussed how the Government’s primary focus at this time became centred on securing temporary accommodation for the new arrivals.

As noted in the following CoSLA interview excerpt, however, one of the main challenges of deciding when, or whether, to pause the scheme was the fact that not all Super Sponsor Scheme visas that were issued were taken up by displaced people from Ukraine – some displaced people from Ukraine had since decided instead to remain in Ukraine or stay elsewhere in Europe, or had applied for multiple visa schemes.

“There was that real tension [of], just because the visas were being approved, did not mean they were all being taken up. [...] I suppose that’s another lesson that I took away was, we needed [to] establish a way to be able to talk to Ukrainians who were in Scotland to understand the mindset of Ukrainians who were not in Scotland. And I think we took too long to get to the point where we [...] went to the Ukrainian Consulate and went, “Right, why have we got X amount of visas applied for, and only this amount [of people travelling]. What’s happening, what are you hearing?”

By the summer of 2022 (see Figure 5), however, interviewees stated that around a hundred people were arriving per day – and there was a real possibility of the scheme becoming completely overwhelmed both due to the sheer volume of arrivals and the challenge of moving people out of Welcome Accommodation once they had been temporarily housed. It is important to note that in the weeks leading up to the eventual

pause of the Super Sponsor Scheme, Local Authority resettlement teams were repeatedly communicating to the Scottish Government that they were in danger of being overwhelmed – with many calling for a cap or pause of the scheme. As was stated by one Local Authority interviewee,

“I would say they took too long. We were asking them to pause the scheme before they did. [...] Local Authorities collectively were feeling the pressure dealing with the volume of numbers. Not wanting to compromise on the quality of service we provide, it was clear we were becoming overwhelmed. Local Authorities were vocal in asking the Scottish Government to pause the scheme, but the visas were still being issued and people were still coming.”

Similarly, in the following Local Authority interview excerpt, the interviewee discussed the need to pause the scheme in the context of services being stretched and housing emergencies being declared in multiple Local Authorities in Scotland.

“Even [before the pause] we were [asking], ‘Why doesn't the Scottish Government cap [the scheme]?’ Because the numbers were still really high. And from a resettlement point of view, you're always willing to be that reception of welcome for everybody. But when the numbers are so massively high and it's getting quite overwhelming, and the pressure on services is so high and housing being the key part of it, and then housing emergencies being declared by some Local Authorities, that's when you think, 'Well, there has to be a cap.' So thankfully [the scheme] is paused. So we can manage the people here, because managing expectations has been a huge part of the Ukraine programme.”

Following the spike in visa approvals, Scottish Government officials and Local Authority resettlement teams in the Welcome Hubs were regularly concerned that there would be no temporary accommodation in which to house new arrivals. Nevertheless, interviewees reported that Ministers were initially hesitant to cap or pause the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. As one Scottish Government source stated,

“Initially Ministers [...] were very reluctant to contemplate a pause. There was a real desire that Scotland would take as many people as wanted to come. One of the things we had to wrestle with, and this was a hard point, was recognising that we had to be confident that we had the services and support available. For me, one of the most worrying aspects of this whole area, this important area of work, was the genuine worry that people would come and we would have nowhere for them [to stay].”

Local Authority interviews with those involved in planning meetings with the Scottish Government highlighted their concerns that, while Ministers were praising the success of the scheme in terms of the number of people resettled and Welcome Accommodation found, there appeared to be limited attention being paid to the long-term challenges being created (discussed in [Section 5.4](#)). Discussing the perception of Ministers' lack of awareness concerning the long-term challenges of these scheme, one Local Authority interviewee stated that,

“It felt that the Scottish Government were looking to do the right thing, but not hearing the voices saying, ‘What is the plan? You can't just do what you're doing without actually having a plan behind it’ [...] And it really did feel as if we had a good relationship with Scottish Government, but I'm not sure we were ever being listened to at all levels. I think [Scottish Government] operational teams understood [the challenges], but things were being missed. Everything [being reported] was positive,

whereas whenever an inquiry is [held] and you look back at all our notes, you will see we were feeding information up the chain to say, 'Well, it's not all positive.' Everyone's doing this for the right reason. But the unintended consequences of this are going to be absolutely huge. There's going to be reputational, operational and a huge financial implication on this. And I think that's been the biggest frustration. [...] But we are still in the same boat [today],^{xxii} when you meet with Ministers [and you] have an honest conversation with them, you can see that they haven't been told this information before. [... In addition,] I think First Minister [Nicola Sturgeon MSP] continually saying, 'Scotland is open for as long as is required' when Local Authorities were saying, 'We have no housing!' has definitely led to strained relations and also led to however many Local Authorities declaring housing emergencies which this has played a part in. There's no denying that."

Ultimately the Super Sponsor Scheme was paused in July 2022 amidst concerns that the Scottish Government would be unable to secure temporary Welcome Accommodation during the summer months (in particular given the full relaunch of the Edinburgh festival following COVID), fears that the public's attitude towards displaced people from Ukraine could turn from compassion to frustration should pressure build on public services, and the realisation that pausing the scheme would be the compassionate thing to do if there was no safe accommodation in which to temporarily house new arrivals.

Data management and data sharing were significant issues for the Scottish Government as regards the visas that were being received and approved by the UK Home Office. The Scottish Government had limited oversight of the backlog of visa applications, something complicated by the fact that not all successful visa applications translated into arrivals. Scottish Government interviewees noted that the lack of oversight of visa approvals affected planning for the procurement of Welcome Accommodation. The Super Sponsor Scheme was paused after a spike in applications in July 2022, however even before this point was reached, Local Authorities had been calling for the scheme to be paused.

5.4 Super Sponsor Scheme ongoing inter-governmental collaboration

In addition to pausing the Super Sponsor Scheme to new applications in June 2022, the Scottish Government conducted a review of the scheme, which was [published](#) in November 2022.¹⁶ The review listed 16 Interventions to guide improvement of the scheme. Such interventions included a 'Scotland Call for Volunteers' to increase the supply of volunteer hosts; committing more resources to national matching efforts (to match guests in Welcome Accommodation to longer-term accommodation); and to provide improved advice on private renting options. Another Intervention was the introduction of a capital fund and programme of work to improve the overall supply of social housing stock. This became the [Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund \(ULTRF\)](#), which worked with Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords to bring back into use void properties, initially for the purpose of housing displaced persons from Ukraine. The scheme was largely viewed as a success by Scottish Government interviewees (with [20 projects](#)

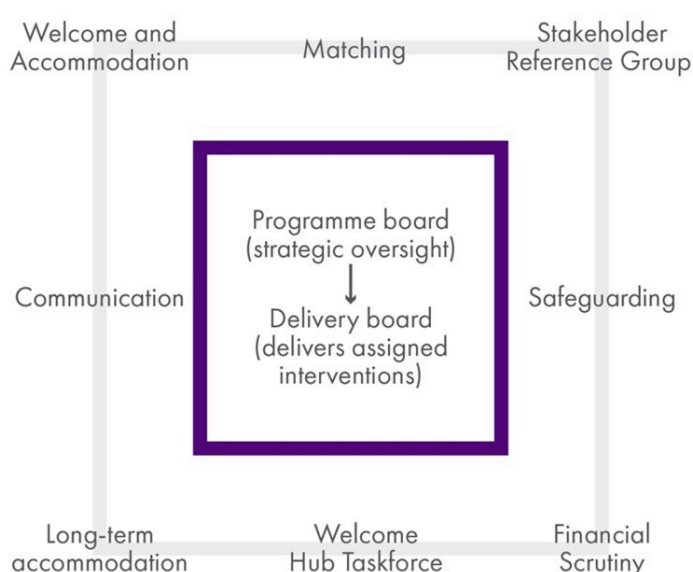
xxii Interview conducted in early 2025.

approved at the time of writing – which will provide a total of 1221 converted units).¹⁷

Following the November 2022 review of the Super Sponsor Scheme, a new governance structure was also established for the scheme. This maintained the Gold -> Silver teams (rebranded as Programme Board and Delivery Board) and created alongside this command structure various working groups focused on the use of Welcome Hubs and related accommodation for arrivals, issues for children and families, safeguarding, trafficking, concerns, matching processes and housing options (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Overview of the revised governance structure for the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme

Figure 6 presents an overview of the revised governance structure for the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme.



Views on the relationships between the Scottish Government and local government throughout the crisis are mixed. Scottish Government interviewees noted positive working relationships with Local Authorities, in particular those in which Welcome Hubs were located. Scottish Government interviewees also reflected on the positive working relationships established with both Edinburgh City Council and Glasgow City Council concerning the extraordinary task of collaborating around the procurement of the cruise ships to provide further Welcome Accommodation. Similarly, Scottish Government respondents noted good working relationships being formed focused on the Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund.

The sense from CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees, however, is that too many civil servants became involved in the Ukraine response – even following the initial period of short-term secondments and the restructuring that followed after the review of the scheme in November 2022. CoSLA and Local Authority respondents noted the exponential growth of papers circulating for comment and meetings requiring their input yet, in their view, without the identification of what the priorities were for those on the ground. As one CoSLA interviewee stated,

“What I really struggled [with] was the sheer scale of the Ukraine Directorate. It was

phenomenal. It tripled our work. [...] And I know it was a crisis [and you need extra people]. But just to have that sheer volume of people in a crisis situation, maybe wasn't the most productive, streamlined, way of getting through the work and dealing with the challenges that kept coming from all over the place. [...] And they were] churning out documents [to be reviewed]. Like the sheer volume of things [being produced], it just felt sometimes like there wasn't that prioritisation [...] You're like, this is not what Local Authorities [need...] we had Local Authorities crying out about particular challenges [...but] we ended up in governance meetings talking about something else and everybody is thinking, 'Why are we talking about this!?'"

The issue of people becoming involved in crisis response indicates the difficult balance that needs to be struck between ensuring enough people are involved to cover decision-making needs at all times, with too many people creating work and requiring time from other stakeholders.

Combined with CoSLA and Local Authorities' views about the size of the Ukraine Directorate was the view that, while the resilience structures established by the Scottish Government had worked during the initial months of the scheme, there was in the eyes of CoSLA and Local Authority research participants then an overreach by the Scottish Government once the scheme entered into its operational phase. As another CoSLA source stated,

"We really missed a trick when we moved [the scheme] out of that resilience phase and into a kind of [...] operational phase [...] during COVID, because civil servants had, by the very nature of the pandemic, been much, much more involved in operational issues at a local level, there was almost a kind of, stretching of the mandate into [new] areas [...] And we had to kind of, bring them back to say, 'We are not starting from scratch here, we've got a New Scots strategy. We've got 25 years of experience in doing this, we've done it for Syrians, we've done it for Afghans.' So, I think there was [...] mission creep in terms of [their approach]."

This view was similarly expressed by Local Authority respondents, who voiced concerns that over-arching issues regarding the scheme (such as the move-on policy discussed in [Section 5.5](#)) remained unresolved while frequent discussions with the Scottish Government took place concerning actions in their area.

"The relationships between Local Authorities and the Scottish Government were not good. We hated being told how to do our job on a daily basis. We have the experience of the delivery of refugee resettlement programmes in our areas. We needed the policies to reflect the national approach but there needed to be the local autonomy and local decision-making. The Scottish Government were slow to understand this. Yet they would also regularly become involved in the minutiae of operational delivery."

An extension of the criticism of the Scottish Government's overreach was that national-scale policy solutions were being sought for issues that, in the view of CoSLA, could be considered at a local level. According to CoSLA and Local Authority research participants, this overreach was then seen as slowing much-needed decision-making and guidance. A CoSLA interviewee recalled that,

"The Scottish Government did not know how to make a call [on issues] because they were getting different views from different parts of the country [...But] I do feel that having so many civil servants [was a case of] too many cooks spoiling the broth. Genuinely [...] you would not have been surprised if you went into a room on pet

policy and there would be six civil servants who were working on this. And you're [thinking], 'What is going on here? Everybody else is firefighting and you have got too many people focused on pulling stuff together.'

Interviews with Local Authority sources also indicated a breakdown in communication occurring between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities. In part this breakdown can be attributed to the latter's view that the scheme's main features were designed without their input (i.e. the lack of a cap on numbers and the issues surrounding the provision of temporary accommodation), but also the means through which meetings took place. As one Local Authority source recollected,

"So we were invited to come along [and] listen. [...] I feel [our views] were acknowledged, but did it translate into the documents or policy quickly enough? Probably not."

Similarly, the following interview quote also notes communication issues, but also links these back to the issue of civil servants joining the resettlement efforts for short spaces of time.

"[The Scottish Government acted as though they] knew best and they were telling us what to do [...] It was awful. And it was a different person every time [coming in with], 'I've come in and I've got new ideas.' We tried to explain to that person [why it would not work but the response would be], 'No, I'm not listening. We don't need that.' Just, 'This is what we're going to do.' And then that person would leave. It was constant."

While Scottish Government interviewees agreed that lessons could be learned from the Super Sponsor Scheme concerning its governance and the possibilities of delegating more decision-making responsibility to CoSLA and Local Authorities, some also noted that it had been the Scottish Government with the most capacity (in terms of number of civil servants) to react to the scheme's needs and organise responses to the challenges being posed – thereby relieving stretched teams in CoSLA and Local Authorities while seeking their input.

Collaboration between the Scottish Government and the UK Government on the Super Sponsor Scheme predominantly took place during its initial setup and the pause (discussed in [Sections 5.1](#) and [5.3](#)). Ongoing collaboration with the UK Government predominantly concerned the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (discussed in [Section 4.4](#)). However, some challenges did remain concerning the Super Sponsor Scheme.

One of the major aspects of the Super Sponsor Scheme that needed to be agreed on was its over-arching funding structure, which had not been agreed upon at the time of the agreement in principle to launch the scheme. In part this lack of clarity stemmed from the fact that the Super Sponsor Scheme is both separate from the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (in that it has a different set of governance structures and includes the use of Welcome Accommodation), yet on the other hand can be viewed as being part of the UK's overall Ukraine response. As a Scottish Government source recounted,

"It wasn't clear how the Super Sponsor Scheme was to be funded, and it took a lot of effort from Scottish Government officials to get us to a point where we felt there was equity between the schemes."

Agreement was reached between the UK Government and the Scottish Government that the Super Sponsor scheme formed part of the UK's overall support of people from Ukraine. As a result, it was also agreed that Local Authorities in Scotland should be eligible for the same [tariff funding](#) for those on the Super Sponsor Scheme as was

available for those on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (discussed in [Section 4.1](#)). Agreement was also reached allowing Local Authorities to claim tariff funding via the Scottish Government. This allowed the Scottish Government to claim UK Government 'thank you' payments for people in Welcome Accommodation. In addition, due to the period of time that people were spending in Welcome Accommodation, separate funding agreements needed to be drawn up in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK regarding tariff allocation between Local Authorities.

Collaboration between the Scottish Government and the UK Home Office was also required concerning the procurement of the cruise ships in Edinburgh and Glasgow, which were used for Welcome Accommodation. Scottish Government respondents reflected that, while this work was ultimately successful, it had been significantly delayed (and risked being cancelled) due to Home Office concerns over the visa statuses of the ships' crew.

Local Authority interviewees reported difficulties in working with Scottish Government civil servants who were temporarily seconded to work on the Super Sponsor Scheme, while the eventual large size of the Ukraine Directorate was viewed by CoSLA interviewees as potentially slowing decision-making. CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees discussed emerging tensions concerning the perceived mission creep of the Scottish Government in the implementation of the scheme and its involvement in operational activities while overarching issues concerning the scheme were unresolved. Following the establishment of the Super Sponsor Scheme, some collaborative challenges between the UK Government and the Scottish Government emerged. These centred on the funding for the scheme and the procurement of M/S Ambition and M/S Victoria for use as Welcome Accommodation.

5.5 Moving people out of Welcome Accommodation

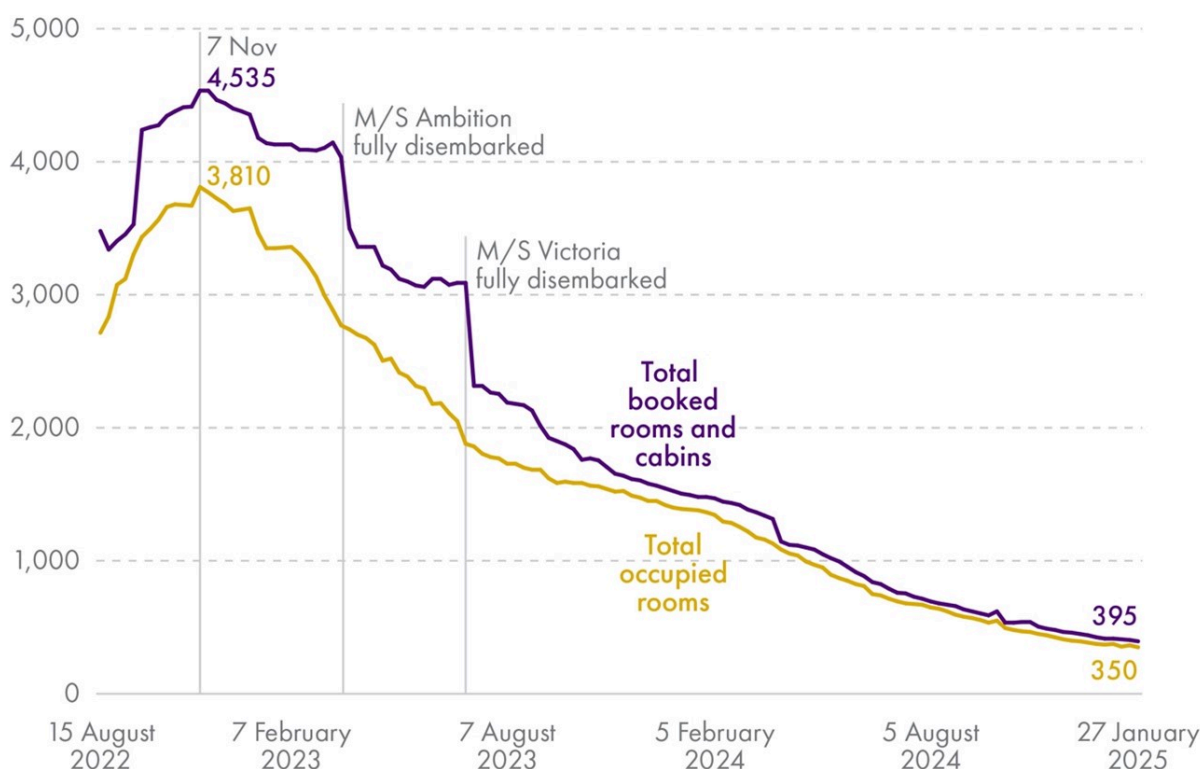
As was established in the Introduction, the main difference between the Super Sponsor Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme is that, under the first, people did not need to find a sponsor before being granted a visa. Instead, people were greeted at the airport and brought to [Welcome Hubs](#) – and from there they were transported to temporary [Welcome Accommodation](#) where they would stay until they could be matched to either a sponsor in Scotland or an available council or [Registered Social Landlord](#) property.

Guests were also encouraged to apply for private rented accommodation, yet often with limited success given the need for references, guarantors and/or requests for rent in advance. One of the challenges experienced by Local Authorities (especially at the outset of the launch of both schemes) was that of conducting safeguarding checks of the host accommodation and the need to communicate with hosts what their roles and responsibilities were in relation to their guests.

While the Scottish Government's original expectation was that guests would only remain in Welcome Accommodation for a number of days or weeks, it quickly transpired that the process of moving people on from Welcome Accommodation would become a major challenge, as indicated by the continued use of Welcome Accommodation throughout the Scottish Government's Ukraine response (see Figure 7).¹⁸

Figure 7: Total number of booked rooms and cabins for Super Sponsor Scheme

Figure 7 shows the total number of booked rooms and cabins for Welcome Accommodation use, and the total number of occupied rooms.



Source: The Scottish Government

Various inter-related issues contributed to the challenge of moving people out of hotel accommodation and it is important to note that there is not a clear agreement amongst all the research participants as to what could have been done to avoid having people remain in hotels for an extended period of time – in some cases years – once over 30,000 visas had been issued within a short space of time.

While there were existing processes for providing refugee resettlement in Scotland prior to Ukraine, a consistent challenge regarding the Super Sponsor Scheme was in (i) understanding how to scale up such processes for the needs created by the size of the scheme and (ii) whether to design new processes given the uniqueness of the situation. It was initially agreed that CoSLA could manage the process of matching new arrivals to available properties as it had experience of doing this for previous resettlement schemes and had an existing process. Yet, as a CoSLA interviewee explained, this process proved insufficient to cope with the number of arrivals.

“The scale just got away [from us]. I think the scale meant that you had to go into hotels. There weren't enough houses. You couldn't use the processes that we did previously. Originally, we had suggested that CoSLA [should] do the matching because we had the Local Authority information. [The Scottish Government would] give us the people that they wanted to match. [But] we weren't expecting 30,000 people to turn up at that point, because we thought they'd put a cap on it. When they didn't put a cap on it, it became very, very apparent that this was completely unmanageable from a CoSLA perspective.”

Respondents from the Scottish Government reflected that, in retrospect, too much time and investment was initially put into trying to augment the existing CoSLA matching process. Once it became clear that the existing process could not work, the Scottish Government and CoSLA collaborated on creating a central matching system – which later became known as the [Warm Scots Welcome app](#). This app was both intended to serve as a national data management system for displaced persons from Ukraine in Scotland and as a means of supporting central matching efforts. However, while initial discussions about a matching app were held in May 2022, it was not until April 2023 that the first Local Authorities were able to start using the app.^{xxiii} By this point, Local Authorities had long-since created their own means of data collection for people in their area – which meant that the app required duplication of work for Local Authorities.

For most Local Authorities, moreover, central matching had limited success compared to matching at a local scale and between councils. Local Authority resettlement teams discussed being able to pick up the phone to each other when properties became available and/or when people in the hotels they were managing expressed being open to moves (the need to encourage people to accept offers of accommodation is discussed below). Where central matching was viewed as successful, however, was when refurbished properties under the [Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund](#) became available. As a result, the app had limited uptake amongst Local Authorities. As stated by Local Authority sources who used the app, this limited uptake then meant that the data which was stored on it was regularly inaccurate and out of date.

“We have tried our best to get involved with [the app], but from our perspective it was something that was introduced far too late in the day. [...] I'm pretty sure every Local Authority would have welcomed it had it been introduced early on. But for us, certainly, it got introduced when it was literally useless to us. [...] I think it was more use to the Scottish Government, perhaps, for their recording of data. But then, we already had our systems in place and [...] we didn't trust it. Every time we went into [the app], it would turn out that the data was inaccurate.”

The issue of the app links to prior issues discussed regarding data management and data sharing between different levels of government during the crisis (discussed in [Section 4.3](#) and [5.2](#)). While being able to access to the UK Government's Foundry system would have helped Scottish Local Authorities track Homes for Ukraine arrivals and maintain records, it should be noted that accessing Foundry would not necessarily have solved the challenge of creating a central matching system - which was the main reason why the Scottish Government did not procure it for the Super Sponsor scheme.

Aside from the scale of the matching requirements, Local Authorities at the start of the Super Sponsor Scheme were still conducting property and disclosure checks for sponsors under the Homes for Ukraine Scheme – which then increased when the Scottish Government issued calls for more sponsors. In the view of Scottish Government research participants, these requirements (though needed) slowed the speed with which people could initially be moved out of [Welcome Accommodation](#). As noted by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“[Completing the] checks took longer than was anticipated. Those checks were very thorough, which was the correct thing to do, but they took time. And I think for some councils, it even took them time to get themselves organised to be able to respond to [the need to complete the checks]. That took longer than we expected. The [numbers

xxiii Dates provided by a CoSLA interviewee.

of people] were much higher than was anticipated, coming into the country. We exceeded that [initial aim of resettling] 3,000 people so quickly, that after that, trying to move people on became even more difficult because of the [numbers].”

Local Authority sources also discussed the challenge of conducting checks with enough speed to encourage people to move out of temporary accommodation. Yet unclear communication concerning hosting requirements in media outlets and the general groundswell of public opinion in favour of assisting Ukraine often slowed the completion of checks. As noted by a Local Authority interviewee,

“Leaving the visa route open for so long and having so many hundreds of applications coming in all at the same time[...] We were absolutely bombarded. It would be a daily basis. You would open an e-mail, there'd be another 100 [host applications]. You're wading your way through those 100 people [and] doing all the background checks. [But] the vast majority were never going to sponsor [...] It was sympathy [and] it was empathy. [But it was also] good people thinking, 'I'll take on someone. They can be my carer.' Well, yeah, actually, no, that is not the purpose [of the scheme]. Or 'I'm looking for a nanny. So I'll sponsor someone.' [...] So I just don't know how much the Scottish Government themselves realised the amount of work that was involved.”

Aside from conducting these checks, however, Local Authorities were also managing the arrivals and queries regarding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and stepping up teams to support the running of Welcome Accommodation hotels if these were being opened in their areas. Conversations about moving on to less temporary accommodation with new arrivals under the Super Sponsor Scheme needed to happen within this context – yet these would often be centred around what was not possible for people. As one Local Authority research participant recollected,

“We spent half our time telling people, [...] 'No, we can't move you to a hotel in England, Edinburgh or Glasgow. We had to deal with that whole, 'We don't want to be here. We want to be out of Ukraine because we're safe. But we don't want to be in [redacted].' Some people got off the bus and went back the next day. Not loads of people. But some people did. It was not their expectation. [...] Subsequently, though, they loved it and we couldn't get them to leave. It was a lovely summer that year [and] they just grew to love it. But having those conversations was all about telling people what they couldn't do, rather than what they could do [...] and the move on policy wasn't in place [yet, so] there were no next steps [for people to follow]. And we were still managing the Homes for Ukraine scheme and all the hosting arrangements. We had two [Welcome Accommodation hotels in the area and] we had loads of [Homes for Ukraine] hosts too, because a lot of people had given up their second homes, so we had competing demands from both schemes going on.”

The above quote also highlights the difference in expectations between new arrivals and what was hoped for as part of the Super Sponsor Scheme – and which can to a certain extent be attributed to the speed with which the scheme was designed. As warned by CoSLA and Local Authority resettlement teams, matching people out of temporary accommodation became a very complicated process. Initially new arrivals were keen to wait until they could facilitate a move to Edinburgh or Glasgow – and then, over time, they became settled in the temporary accommodation as they befriended each other, gained employment, enrolled their children in schools and became used to the area in which they had been placed.^{xxiv} The challenge of encouraging people to move once they had started

xxiv This was an issue not encountered in Scotland during the Syrian Resettlement Scheme as people were transported

to integrate locally was discussed by a Scottish Government interviewee,

“One of the benefits of the scheme was the fact that people could start to work and people could [enrol their children in] schools. So it became difficult to move people because they had got jobs and did not want to move, and so they were kind of thinking, ‘Well, I don’t want to go all the way to Aberdeen from Edinburgh’ and things like that. [...] There was also a perception [where], I think, they had already had the upheaval of leaving their homes – and some of that journey was extremely complicated to get to Scotland – so by the time they got to Scotland and felt safe and had a bit of a [safe] haven, they did not want to move [again]. So we had to do a lot of encouraging them by having other fellow Ukrainians say to them, ‘Actually, I’m living here and this is great, or I’m in this small community and it’s great, and I’ve got a job and I’ve got friends, and I’ve got everything I need to have.’”

Encouraging people to leave the hotels therefore became one of the many tasks for the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to complete. Yet there was also no clear agreed-upon end date for guests in the hotels and Local Authority teams had no authority to insist upon moves. Moreover, though Local Authority teams were experts in resettlement, they had relatively little experience of moving people out of temporary Welcome Accommodation due to the fact that, in most resettlement schemes, accommodation is lined up prior to arrival. Some Local Authorities were able to learn from the experiences of others prior to the opening of hotels in their areas.

The situation was also made more complicated compared to other resettlement schemes because people would frequently travel back to Ukraine (and other countries) for varying periods of time. As a result, keeping a (paid for) hotel room was for many people a more logical choice than moving out into sponsored accommodation or social housing that needed to be paid for. When offers of accommodation were found for people, these would therefore often be turned down – though respondents noted that many of the most desirable host options had already been taken up by the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, such that many of the offers that remained were in harder to reach locations. Such was the frequency that offers of accommodation were turned down, that potential hosts started withdrawing their offers. A Local Authority source stated that,

“For probably a year or more, we haven't had any available hosts. Because what happened is that the hosts basically passed all their checks, were approved, but then they got fed up waiting on a guest and we couldn't convince anybody to move there. So they then withdrew as a consequence. That was unfortunate.”

Similarly – and referring to the central matching process that had been established through the [Warm Scots Welcome app](#) – the following Local Authority interviewee discussed the rate of failure concerning matching,

"[Matching] was a very long, protracted process where somebody would e-mail you with a possible family to be matched with a possible host. You would have to contact the host to see if they were interested [...] And then I would have to e-mail back to the [central matching] person to see if [the Ukrainian] person was interested or not. It just became really clunky. [...] It could take three weeks to even set up a communication. And that was difficult because people [would] go and [and meet each other but] then [people would decide] they didn't want to come [here]. And 3-4-5-6-7-8-9 times I would have to go back to the host saying, ‘Thank you very much for your interest. However,

directly from the airport to pre-procured homes, but it was an issue that had recently been experienced by the UK Government on the Afghan resettlement schemes.

the family doesn't want to leave the city. [...] This is no reflection on yourself.' And after half a dozen times they were saying, 'Look, we've had enough, you know, we've tried to make contact with at least half a dozen people now and it's not working.'"

Matching people to properties through a centralised system also proved to be a particularly complicated process; as what would appear to be a good match on paper (e.g. a three-bedroom house for a family) would not necessarily be a desirable match in practice – especially once people had begun to settle where they had initially been placed and formed community ties. As a result, Local Authority interviewees were (and continue to be) concerned about the risk of large numbers of persons from Ukraine presenting as homeless in central locations. As a Local Authority source stated,

"I had a lot of colleagues who were presenting the concern that they were going to be breaching their statutory duties in terms of homelessness [...] Colleagues were saying, 'Look, I am going to have thousands of people presenting as homeless here [...] because of the way we've done it. We have stuck them in Edinburgh, as opposed to going with a dispersal model right from the start."

Where possible, Local Authority resettlement teams reported success in matching people to local properties – helped by their knowledge of the area and services – and collaboration between Local Authority teams until most accessible properties had been taken up. Therefore, the challenge of moving people out of hotels was also one of housing capacity. Regarding the lack of housing capacity, a Local Authority interviewee stated that,

"So [matching] probably started drying up for us about the start of 2023 because more and more hotels were popping up and our lovely colleagues down in [redacted LA] had taken a lot of families and then they got their own hotel and then they said, 'That's that we can't take anymore'. And I said, 'That's quite reasonable.' But then it went across the board. [Redacted LA] was good, but then they got three hotels^{xxv} in one go and it was the same in [redacted LA] [when] they started getting hotels."

By the start of 2023, therefore, a difficult situation had been created in which there was limited housing available for people who were still in Welcome Accommodation, frequent refusals from residents to accept housing when this was being offered and significant fears amongst certain Local Authorities of potentially overwhelming homeless presentations occurring in the midst of a housing crisis. Reflecting on the need to have provided better communication to new arrivals concerning their housing options, one Scottish Government interviewee stated that,

"There was, I think, an expectation on the Ukrainians' part that there was only work and only schools in the cities, because [perhaps] that is what they expect in Ukraine. And we were picking that up very clearly but [...] I think we could have done more to sell the benefits of other parts of the country in an earlier part of the process, so that we weren't seeing this clamour or demand to only be in Edinburgh or in Glasgow."

Tensions between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities also rose due to competing understandings of what it means to be vulnerable, how to implement policy in relation to vulnerable individuals, and the risk of creating double standards within existing homeless policies in Scotland. For example, Local Authorities are required to only provide [one suitable offer](#) of accommodation for persons who are unintentionally homeless and there is a maximum of seven days that people can be required to spend in temporary

xxv i.e. when the Scottish Government procured Welcome Accommodation hotels in their council area.

accommodation while a Local Authority prepared such an offer (during which time they might have to [contribute](#) to the cost of the temporary accommodation).

While Local Authority resettlement teams encountered many traumatised individuals who were exceptionally vulnerable, they also helped and welcomed many that had not experienced severe trauma and who were self-sufficient after receiving support. The following quotes highlight the disparity that existed between the Scottish Government and local government concerning what it means to be vulnerable and how best to care for people. Reflecting on the need to provide 'maximum support' while encouraging people to leave temporary accommodation, a Scottish Government interviewee stated that,

“Because we were dealing there with traumatised [people...] from a war zone, we wanted to make sure that we were giving them the maximum possible support and we weren't being dictatorial around how they were being treated when they arrived in this country. So, it [later] became necessary to get to a point where we were trying to be more persuasive around moving on from welcome accommodation, but we did that in direct collaboration with the Ukrainian Consulate in Edinburgh, with [AUGB](#) [the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain], so that we were working with Ukrainian representatives around how that looked and felt.”

From the perspective of those interviewed from CoSLA and Local Authorities, however, it was instead imperative to integrate people into communities as quickly as possible – which required a firmer approach. As stated by a CoSLA source,

“A lot of our seasoned resettlement leads were saying, the only way to [move people on is through a] three strikes and then you're out, kind of business. And that sounds really harsh, but their experience was [that] the [New Scots \[Refugee Integration Strategy\]](#) is about integration. It's not about putting people in hotels and leaving them there. The other thing that was clear from a local government perspective was parity with the other [refugee] schemes that we were running [and] parity with our other stakeholders, who were in temporary accommodation, or waiting on a housing allocation. [...] In very practical terms, it was just becoming problematic for people to stay in hotels, financially, it was not good for their wellbeing, and it was completely at odds with the New Scots strategy. So, I think local government were more comfortable with that [and] quicker than colleagues in Scottish Government. But some of that was because they had 25 years' experience of doing it.”

One of the challenges that stakeholders were required to overcome was the absence of a clear agreement and set of expectations with those that were placed in [Welcome Accommodation](#) before or upon their arrival. Again, this absence speaks, in part, to the lack of time available to design the Super Sponsor Scheme. However, Local Authority interviewees also viewed the absence of such an agreement as a political choice, which then slowed the process of encouraging people out of Welcome Accommodation. As one Local Authority interviewee stated,

“[Scottish Government] Ministers did not want to grip some of the difficult decisions in terms of the scheme design. [They] did not want to be seen to be [harsh...] And I can understand it, [saying] ‘You need to move on’ may not feel as though that's that hospitable. But actually it's just straightforward and practical, which is about saying, ‘We're offering huge amounts of generosity, but here's the deal on that respect.’ And I think if that had been upfront, then people would have understood and got on with it as well.”

As discussed in [Section 5.4](#), the Scottish Government published a [review](#) of the Super Sponsor Scheme in November 2022, which included 16 Interventions to guide improvement of the scheme. Included in these Interventions was “Refinement of Accommodation Offer”, which included the adjusting of the provision of accommodation “and consideration of time limits and contributions, depending on needs and income of guests.” This Intervention did not constitute a move-on policy in and of itself, although interviewed stakeholders involved in matching did consider it to have been an effective measure in encouraging people out of [Welcome Accommodation](#).

A significant challenge for the Scottish Government was that of considering the person-centred needs of guests, Local Authorities’ concerns regarding homeless presentations (in central areas in particular), and the fact that the policy had to be designed retrospectively – after people had already become settled in Welcome Accommodation. Reflecting on this challenge, one Scottish Government interviewee stated,

“Even in those earlier days [of the Super Sponsor Scheme] there were discussions about [a move-on policy], but the level of delay just shows how difficult an issue that was [...] We were getting lots of different views on these issues [from CoSLA and Local Authorities], and the Government had to try and distil that range of views. There was a desire to take a person-centred approach and to work with individuals in a way that gave them a fair degree of choice. So there was certainly some resistance to a really inflexible policy. But I can also quite recognise, with the benefit of hindsight, there should arguably have been a firmer policy in place earlier. [...] However, there was [also] anxiety on the part of local government that it might increase their homelessness numbers at a time when there were broader forces at play that were already going in the wrong direction around homelessness.”

However, even when offering refurbished properties funded by the [Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund](#) (discussed in [Section 5.4](#)), the Scottish Government and Local Authorities still struggled to move people out of Welcome Accommodation. As one Scottish Government interviewee reflected, there was a difficult balancing act to strike between offering people a choice of accommodation, providing Local Authorities with a means to encourage people out of Welcome Accommodation, and ensuring that people did not present as homeless once a policy was introduced.

“I remember going to [redacted Local Authority] to look at the accommodation that they had brought back on as part of the [ULTRF] Scheme. And it was fabulous what had been provided, but people didn’t want to move from the hotels to [accommodation]. And that was why the ask was, ‘We’ve got this [housing] but we cannot get people [in Welcome Accommodation] to move out. They were refusing. So that right of choice being there was completely correct, but [at the same time], you can’t stay in a hotel, you can’t keep doing this. So how do you move them?’ [...] And] at that stage, were [also] trying to avoid adding numbers into the homelessness route. So we were trying to keep the pressure off other parts of what the [Local Authorities] were dealing with. [...] The one pushback [from Local Authorities] about providing accommodation was, ‘You cannot then impact onto our homelessness challenge that we already have.’ So [Local Authorities] kept reinforcing that message and saying, ‘People will just declare themselves homeless, and we already have a homeless problem in Scotland [...] So that was where we were trying not to make something else worse because of decisions we were making [regarding hotels and the move-on policy].”

During this time frustrations grew that a move-on policy was not being agreed. Regular

meetings were held to attempt to implement national matching, yet trust amongst stakeholders reduced as the challenge of adapting the policy became greater. Concerning the lack of trust that had built up between the Scottish Government and Local Government, a CoSLA interviewee stated that,

“There was a lack of trust in both directions. [...] Because the scheme that was created was something that was far from perfect. Therefore, to then retrofit policies onto that was difficult. [...] And there were differential views between the Scottish Government and local government on whatever those policies might be. And there were differential views across Local Authorities too for that matter, which is understandable, because what works in one Local Authority, doesn't in another.”

Although discussions had started concerning the need for a move-on policy near the start of the Super Sponsor Scheme, it was not until January 2024 that a move-on policy was agreed between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities. A move-on policy was agreed, which would provide those still in Welcome Accommodation with two final offers of accommodation (one with a host and one offer of tenancy). If both are refused, guests in Welcome Accommodation can be issued with a 60-day notice to leave the accommodation and, if needed, can be evicted. While some Local Authorities proceeded immediately with two offers of accommodation and issued 60-day notices as early as March 2024, others were more cautious. Local Authorities that proceeded more swiftly with the issuing of 60-day notices reflected on their in-depth knowledge of guests still in Welcome Accommodation by 2024; stating that they believed guests with 60-day notices were unlikely to remain in Scotland once the offer of Welcome Accommodation had been withdrawn.

Following the publication of the move-on policy and the refurbishment of hundreds of properties under the Ukraine Long Term Resettlement Fund, most Local Authorities who were interviewed reported success in moving people out of Welcome Accommodation – or reported that people had chosen to leave Scotland. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, concern remains in certain Local Authorities that there is as-yet no long-term solution to potential homeless presentations in the near-future, or a sustainable solution in place should the remaining persons who have been granted a Super Sponsor visa travel to Scotland.

While the procurement of Welcome Accommodation provided temporary housing for those arriving on the Super Sponsor Scheme, there were significant challenges in then moving people on to long-term housing. Communication issues with potential hosts and the need to conduct property and disclosure checks meant that there was not an immediately available supply of housing for people to move into. In addition, there were issues regarding the management of expectations for those arriving through the scheme and the expectation that people would move on as soon as possible. There was also a lack of alignment between the Scottish Government and Local Authority resettlement leads concerning the best means of enacting the scheme in a trauma-informed manner; with the Scottish Government aiming to provide as much support as possible for people in Welcome Accommodation, while some resettlement leads were in favour of a firmer approach to encourage movement into stable housing situations as soon as possible. The situation concerning Welcome Accommodation was further complicated by existing pressures on the supply of housing, and concerns amongst certain Local Authorities of the exacerbation of housing emergencies.

6. Conclusions

It is important to remember that there were just 32 days between the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and people being able to apply for both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme (either through private sponsorship or by naming the Scottish Government as a Super Sponsor). Strategic decisions were therefore taken quickly and with limited availability of data. There was also a tremendous amount of goodwill involved from those working on the schemes and commitment to pull together and welcome those arriving from Ukraine – with many who worked on the schemes also experiencing serious physical and emotional challenges resulting from the demands of the challenges discussed in this briefing.

In many respects, the resettlement of people from Ukraine to Scotland was a demonstration of the UK Government, Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities cooperating in the face of a crisis. The Ukraine response emphasised the value of trust and regular communication between Scottish Government departments and their UK Government counterparts – especially where these departments do not routinely work together outside of crisis situations. The need to respond quickly to the war in Ukraine also provided opportunities for innovation to occur in the context of resettlement and housing. The Homes for Ukraine Scheme proved that a private sponsorship model for refugee evacuation can work in the short term. Accounting for 17.4% of UK arrivals under the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme demonstrated that the Scottish Government can act as a sponsor and administer part of a resettlement scheme. Moreover, as demonstrated by the Ukraine Longer-Term Resettlement Fund and the renovation of void properties, flexible thinking during crises can result in novel approaches that can be implemented in the long term.

The aim for this section is to draw together the key conclusions from the launch and implementation of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in Scotland.

6.1 Designing a crisis response

Forced migration and refugee resettlement governance structures had been established in Scotland prior to the launch of the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. [Strategic Migration Partnerships](#) worked with the UK Government in this regard and CoSLA was the main strategic point of contact concerning refugee resettlement schemes and their implementation in Local Authorities in Scotland. Meanwhile, the [New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy](#) provides an over-arching approach and integration principles for those working on refugee integration in Scotland, as well as a governance structure with bespoke working groups. For the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, [Section 4](#) of this briefing set out how the [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities](#) under-utilised the Strategic Migration Partnerships during the design of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. There was also minimal involvement with refugee resettlement teams in Local Authorities, especially concerning how the sponsorship model would be communicated to communities.

Existing partnerships between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and the Scottish Refugee Council – established through the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy – supported the Scottish Government Ministers' decision to launch the Super Sponsor Scheme. While there was experience of refugee resettlement amongst New Scots partners, the teams

working on refugee resettlement in the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities were relatively small. In addition to there being a lack of alignment concerning the vision for the Super Sponsor Scheme and whether it was designed in accordance with the principles of the New Scots Strategy, the uncapped nature of the scheme threatened to overwhelm those supporting it. During the design phase of the Super Sponsor Scheme, CoSLA and Local Authorities had voiced their concern regarding the use of temporary Welcome Accommodation and the expectation that people would move-on quickly. The design of a response to a future migration crisis could include:

- While a crisis response may require resilience structures to be established, existing governance structures should be recognised and utilised as far as possible in the design of new schemes.
- Consideration should be given to the resources available and the experience of government departments and Local Authority teams when designing crisis response policies.
- Institutional knowledge of actors with past implementation experience should be leveraged as far as possible to support the design of a crisis response.
- Understanding is required of available housing prior to setting out the parameters of a response. This is equally valid in the context of private sponsorships, as these will likely end prior to the resolution of a crisis.
- Long-term considerations should be made regarding the ongoing responsibilities of those implementing a scheme and the necessary financial support agreed in advance.

6.2 Data management and data transfer

Data management and data transfer were huge challenges in the enactment of both the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme. As discussed in [Section 4.3](#), Local Authorities were slow in receiving data concerning new arrivals – which meant that safeguarding checks were often not being conducted until after people had arrived and were already living with sponsors. For the Scottish Government, although some access had been granted to civil servants to the UK Government’s visa processing platform, the lack of access to visa processing data created huge challenges. The challenges around matching and the development of a national matching app for Scotland, meanwhile, demonstrated the difficulties of retrospectively creating a data management tool after Local Authorities had already been enacting their data management processes for over a year. In the event of a future forced migration crisis arising that requires inter-governmental cooperation, therefore, the following may be worth considering:

- Data management and data transfer should be at the forefront of discussions when establishing a response to a crisis.
- In the event of there being a bespoke Scottish scheme, such as the Super Sponsor Scheme, a means of temporarily granting the Scottish Government access to visa processing data should be considered.
- Recognition is needed of the time it takes to develop a bespoke data management system and the limitations of such a system’s uses if it requires duplication of data

entry and data migration.

- Consideration should be given to Local Authorities in Scotland being granted access to UK Government data management systems when implementing UK Government schemes where such access is granted to Local Authorities in England.

6.3 Person-centred approach

There were safeguarding concerns regarding the Homes for Ukraine Scheme, which proved to be well-founded when people regularly arrived in the sponsors' homes prior to checks having taken place and occasionally before Local Authorities were aware of the visas having been issued. While the war in Ukraine necessitated the creation of a new resettlement scheme, the creation of multiple resettlement schemes – which were added to an array of existing refugee schemes with different rights, responsibilities and funding instructions – created confusion at the point of delivery and exacerbated disparities between people.

The Super Sponsor Scheme also created disparities between people, most notably concerning the right to refuse the offer of accommodation while in free, temporary Welcome Accommodation. Moreover, there was a lack of alignment between the Scottish Government and Local Authorities concerning the best means of providing trauma-informed support. Prior to the pausing of the Super Sponsor Scheme, Local Authorities and CoSLA had called for it to be capped and/or paused amidst fears of bottlenecks being created in Welcome Accommodation and the potential for homeless presentations in areas experiencing housing emergencies. Future options regarding a forced migration crisis response design could include:

- For person-centred and trauma-informed approaches, greater alignment should be considered between government departments designing policy and those responsible for implementing it.
- When considering possible resettlement responses, it is important to ensure that the offer being made is consistent with existing resettlement schemes. The resettlement response should also align with existing guidance and practice in other policy areas, for instance the [code of guidance](#) for homelessness.¹⁹
- To ensure smooth operation of resettlement schemes, there is a need for clear communication to those being resettled of the expectations which are made of them in return for the support they are granted, such as Welcome Accommodation.

6.4 Communication and collaboration

In the case of the implementation of the Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, there was evidence of good collaboration taking place between civil servants serving the Scottish and UK governments and of learnings being shared. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a reluctance by the UK Government to consider the governance of forced migration to

Scotland in the round.^{xxvi} This was demonstrated by the limited engagement between the

xxvi The UK Government was approached through various means to participate in this study, yet these requests for

Home Office and DLUHC with the Scottish Government and Local Authorities on the effect of the Super Sponsor Scheme on asylum dispersal plans in Scotland. Local Authorities also reported having limited engagement with the UK Government on the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. The UK Government included information about the Homes for Ukraine Scheme in its regular meetings, which were ostensibly to discuss Afghan refugee resettlement. This meant that there was limited time to discuss Ukraine resettlement and councils without Afghan refugees were initially unaware of the meetings taking place. Moreover, the inclusion of hundreds of council resettlement teams meant that there was limited opportunity for the effective exchange of information. There was also limited discussion with Local Authorities regarding how the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme would be implemented.

The design and implementation of the Scottish Super Sponsor Scheme required close collaboration between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authorities. Respondents noted good collaboration between the Scottish Government and the UK Government when sharing learnings across the four nations. Respondents from CoSLA and Local Authorities noted that, while their views were invited regarding the design and implementation of the scheme, they were frustrated at what they saw as the lack of inclusion of these views. Relations between the Scottish Government, CoSLA and Local Authority resettlement teams became increasingly strained as the Super Sponsor Scheme was being implemented and bottlenecks occurred in the Welcome Accommodation. CoSLA and Local Authority interviewees noted the enthusiasm of Scottish Government civil servants to work on the scheme and also that the Scottish Government had the greatest capacity to add numbers of people to work on the scheme. However, this engagement was viewed as being hindered by the temporary nature of civil servants' secondments to the scheme, a lack of experience in resettlement policy, and a focus on day-to-day procedural matters while over-arching issues concerning the scheme were unresolved and required policy guidance.

Options for a future forced migration crisis response could include:

- When implementing a UK-wide resettlement scheme, the UK Government could recognise the different information needs of Local Authorities depending on geographical contexts. Separate information sharing meetings with Local Authorities could be organised across the four nations of the UK, especially where a nation has implemented a bespoke response – such as the Super Sponsor Scheme – which affects the implementation of the UK-wide scheme.
- Information-sharing meetings between the UK Government and Local Authorities could be more collaborative, rather than being viewed as an opportunity for predominantly sharing guidance for Local Authorities to implement.
- Cross-policy working from governments to better coordinate a crisis response across the whole of government could be considered.
- Consideration should be given to how the Scottish Government can effectively resource a crisis response whilst not relying on short secondments for staff leading to high turnover.
- Whilst governments should be responsible for developing a crisis response policy – and the initial stages of the response may require operational involvement of governments – implementation of the policy should as far as possible be the

participation were declined.

responsibility of those at the appropriate level and with operational experience.

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