



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 21 April 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Thursday 21 April 2022**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CRISIS IN UKRAINE.....</b>	<b>2</b>

---

**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**  
**12<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2022, Session 6**

**CONVENER**

\*Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

**DEPUTY CONVENER**

\*Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

\*Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

\*Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)

\*Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con)

\*Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

\*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

\*attended

**THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:**

Hazel Chisholm (Highland Council)

Gayle Findlay (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities)

Elaine Ritchie (Perth and Kinross Council)

Pat Togher (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

James Johnston

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

### Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 21 April 2022

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:07]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning, and welcome to the 12th meeting in 2021 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. I apologise for the slight delay in starting, which was a result of technical issues with onboarding some of our witnesses. We hope to be joined remotely by one of our committee members, Maurice Golden.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Is the committee content to take item 3 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Crisis in Ukraine

09:07

**The Convener:** Item 2 is further consideration of the humanitarian impact of the crisis in Ukraine. We are joined remotely by a panel of witnesses: Pat Togher, assistant chief officer, public protection and complex needs, Glasgow city health and social care partnership; Elaine Ritchie, senior service manager, Perth and Kinross Council; Hazel Chisholm, housing policy officer, Highland Council; and Gayle Findlay, policy manager, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I welcome you all to the meeting.

I will open with a couple of questions, which are probably for Ms Findlay. In your written submission to the committee, you say:

“COSLA is working with the Scottish Government to establish a centralised matching system”,

drawing on the experience from previous resettlement schemes. I would like to know a bit more about that. In addition, you say that you are working regularly with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers, but that there are “additional issues” that “remain unresolved”. Can you elaborate a little on what those issues are?

**Gayle Findlay (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities):** Thank you for having us at the committee, convener.

First, on matching, the committee will be aware that COSLA has worked in the resettlement space for many years, and one of the main roles that it has undertaken has been working with the Home Office on matching refugees with local authority placements. The plan with the Ukrainian scheme, through the Scottish supersponsorship scheme, is to replicate that in some form.

We appreciate that the scale of the Ukrainian offer from the Scottish Government is significantly different—we are looking at thousands of arrivals in the next few months, rather than over a couple of years, which is probably the more normal route for refugee resettlement—but we have a model that has worked really well in ensuring that, when we have information about a displaced person or refugee, they are located in a placement that fits their needs. That means that they have the right-sized house, their health needs are met, their mobility needs are addressed and their educational needs, as well as other things, are considered. Those are the main things.

We are currently working with the Scottish Government on how we scale that up to something that can cope with the numbers that are arriving. That is still in train, but we have a system

that we can use for the people who may arrive over the next couple of weeks, which replicates what we have been doing for the past few years.

You asked about the additional issues. Working through what a matching service would look like, there are issues around how the welcome hubs will operate and what their role will be. There are currently four welcome hubs in Scotland—in Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh and Renfrewshire. Although those are established, there are still things to be worked through in relation to their exact role. There are also issues around funding not being confirmed.

The scale of the ask is very different from anything that we have done in Scotland before. There are lots of things that people across all the different departments in the Scottish Government and local authorities need to consider, whether that is to do with public protection, unaccompanied minors, or even really small things such as the arrival of pets, which actually seems to be quite a big issue but has never come across our radar before with regard to refugee resettlement.

We now have in place a really strong gold-silver-bronze command structure between the Scottish Government and the partners, and we are all participating in that. Although there are lots of groups and lots of meetings, the structure seems to have brought focus, and there is a route through which to refer issues up and down to be resolved at the appropriate seniority level.

COSLA works closely with SOLACE all the time—that is part of our role. Being able to speak to all 32 chief executives is really important, as we can then represent their views within that command structure.

I hope that that answers your question.

**The Convener:** Yes, thank you very much. We will now move to questions from the committee.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** There have been some examples in England where, under the Ukraine family scheme, extended family members have been brought over. There have then been some difficulties in relation to securing appropriate accommodation and some of those people have gone on to present as homeless. Has that happened in Scotland? Do you foresee that happening or will the structures that are being put in place here mitigate against anything like that happening?

**Gayle Findlay:** That has happened in Scotland already and it is happening through the family visa scheme. The issue is not necessarily about family relationships breaking down, but just that people do not have the space to accommodate their family in a long-term situation. We know that

people have presented as homeless, because, at the moment, that is the only route.

The Scottish Government is working with the UK Government to allow the transfer of people from visa scheme to visa scheme so that we can move those people into the supersponsorship scheme and then house them appropriately. However, the only current route for those people whose placement breaks down or who are unable to stay with their family is to present as homeless within the local authority that they are in. That has happened in Scotland, unfortunately.

**Mark Ruskell:** Do other members of the panel have any further reflections on that or examples to give?

**Pat Togher (Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership):** We have given quite considerable thought to that issue and I think that, based on everything that we know so far, with the best will in the world, it is unlikely that we will be able to mitigate that possibility in its entirety, despite the level of support that we will be able to put in place. It is very much about what Gayle Findlay has just explained. It is not necessarily about safeguarding issues; it is more about the capacity and space of some of the properties.

The best intentions are not always realised when people arrive, and they can subsequently end up coming through the homeless route, which as Gayle Findlay mentioned, is their only route just now. We will endeavour to support sponsors whenever we can to make sure that the deal is supported in the process, but we are already starting to see some of that coming through.

09:15

**Elaine Ritchie (Perth and Kinross Council):** From a Perth and Kinross perspective, we have not—[*Inaudible.*]—but I know from our weekly meetings, which are chaired by COSLA and the Scottish Government, that other local authorities have seen people presenting as homeless in the larger cities. I understand that they have been dealt with in accordance with our homeless legislation, which as you know, is quite significant in Scotland. They will be provided with appropriate accommodation and wraparound support.

**Hazel Chisholm (Highland Council):** We have already had one of our placements fail after just a couple of days. There is real concern, because those guests did not present in Highland: they travelled to Renfrewshire, found accommodation with friends and will be travelling to England.

Each case could be complex, and we have to identify each case that fails in its own context. That will be a challenge, especially for us in Highland, where we have a big geographical

spread and some of our hosts and matches are in very rural communities. Sometimes people present in places where we do not have accommodation. There are plenty of challenges and we are very concerned about situations failing and the impact on the current homeless situation in Highland. All local authorities will find that a challenge.

**Mark Ruskell:** I will ask Elaine Ritchie a specific question. I recently met Stewarts of Tayside, which employs a lot of Ukrainian workers, sometimes on a seasonal basis and sometimes on a longer-term basis. The concern that it and some of its workers had is that although there is an assurance that the temporary visas can be extended to December 2022, the paperwork for their formal extension has not yet come through. Is that something that you are aware of, particularly in the rural context where there are a lot of Ukrainian seasonal workers in Perth and Kinross? Are you urging the Home Office to make sure that people are getting the necessary documents so that they have the assurance that they need that they can stay?

**Elaine Ritchie:** That is not currently an issue that we are aware of in Perth and Kinross, but we would provide that support and assistance. That was an issue during lockdown, particularly when all the hotels and industry closed down and we had to accommodate a lot of our seasonal workers. We would replicate that approach again if it became an issue, to make sure that people are safe and secure and to provide them with accommodation.

We have raised the issue locally. We have set up a local network with various agencies, and it is a priority as a discussion area, but it is not a current issue, because we understand that the paperwork will come through. If people lose their employment or accommodation, we have a multi-agency response ready to provide support to Ukrainian refugees.

Although it is not a current issue, we have processes and a framework in place should it become one. We are monitoring the situation and are working closely with colleagues in COSLA and the Scottish Government to try to resolve the matter and provide certainty on the visa and the paperwork and timescales that go with it.

**Mark Ruskell:** I hope that that will come through in the next week, because we are running up to the end of the month. I have one extra question about undocumented Ukrainian citizens who were here before 1 January 2022. They are a bit caught, because they are not part of any of the current schemes that have been announced to enable people to have extended visas here.

Is that a problem? Are there significant numbers of people involved? Do you know how many people are here and are undocumented—and are therefore ineligible for the schemes? Do you have any concerns around that and about how people could potentially be affected by the Rwandan scheme or any other scheme?

**Elaine Ritchie:** I do not have any figures or knowledge about undocumented people. That is not something that we are sighted on or that we are aware of, and that has not come through in Perth and Kinross or from any of the other local authorities that we work closely with. Perhaps Gayle Findlay might have a better awareness of that from a COSLA perspective.

**Mark Ruskell:** Yes—if we could get a COSLA perspective, that would be good, too.

**Gayle Findlay:** You will be aware that visas and immigration are the domain of the Home Office. COSLA and the Scottish Government are making representations about all the different visa questions, including the one that you asked previously, about workers, and about issues concerning students and people on visitors visas. We know from conversations with the Home Office that it does not want Ukrainians to be pushed into an asylum route. There is a route at the moment where people can begin an application within the country to remain on the Ukraine visa. There is a period when they will remain undocumented, but that route for people to apply is open, and it was not there at the beginning of the scheme. That is a positive step forward, although there still needs to be more clarity from the Home Office around how it is going to support people in that situation.

The other reassuring thing is that the Home Office is looking to ensure that Ukrainians do not present in the asylum system. That is obviously not a route that we would recommend anybody should go down if there is a humanitarian protection programme that would help them.

The Scottish Government has funded JustRight Scotland, which provides legal advice to Ukrainians in Scotland. That is a really welcome addition. We probably need more of that, as I know that JustRight is already very busy with questions, but it will be able to provide that support, whereas local authorities do not provide immigration advice as a rule, and we would be directing people to that kind of support so that they get the help and advice that they need to get on the right path.

**Mark Ruskell:** Do any other panellists want to contribute on either of those questions?

**Hazel Chisholm:** We are not aware of any numbers; I do not have any data on Ukrainians who have previously been impacted by not having

any documentation, so I would not be able to comment. We have not been made aware of that.

**Pat Togher:** We are not aware of any data around that either, but we would take a position of mitigating against any risk of destitution, in the same way that we have done with our no recourse to public funds population in Glasgow. That was done very successfully during the pandemic.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Good morning to the panel. I will follow up on the question that Mark Ruskell posed about the difficulties involving refugees who become homeless having arrived in Scotland. One reason for that could be that the accommodation of their sponsor host is unsuitable. What work is being done by local authorities to check for suitability of accommodation prior to the arrival of refugees? Is that happening? How easy is that to facilitate?

**Gayle Findlay:** As part of the homes for Ukraine scheme, local authorities are required to undertake a property check and an enhanced disclosure check on the host and any over-16s in the household. Local authorities have started receiving information about their hosts under the homes for Ukraine scheme, and they have therefore started undertaking the checks.

You will appreciate that that is quite a large task. For some local authorities, there are challenges around the staffing required to undertake the checks. We are working closely with Disclosure Scotland to ensure that the disclosure checks are done quickly, but the property checks still need to happen, too.

It is slightly different with the supersponsorship scheme, because there will be a number of host properties in that, but we will not match anybody until all the checks have taken place. That provides mitigation and reassurance that any safeguarding concerns would be highlighted and the property would not be used in the sponsorship scheme. However, because the homes for Ukraine scheme is a visa-driven system, the Ukrainians can arrive as soon as their visa is issued and the local authorities do not get the data on those cases until the visa is issued, so it is a matter of doing things as quickly as possible.

All the local authorities that are represented at this meeting will be able to describe their local processes and some of the challenges that they face in the scheme.

**Donald Cameron:** I turn to the representatives from the local authorities to gauge the issues from their perspective.

**Hazel Chisholm:** We first got access to the data from the Scottish Government on 6 April. To date, we have 72 properties registered and matched with Ukrainian families spread across

Highland Council—everywhere from Skye to Wick, Inverness and Fort William. The challenges are getting to those properties, some of which are quite rural, and having the officers to do so.

We set up an officer to go out and check properties. Unfortunately, with Covid still very much being around, he came down with it and had to get one of his colleagues to step in. That is just one of the challenges. It is quite a challenge to ask a team that is already busy to go out and check 70 properties, so staffing is a challenge for us.

Every day, we give the property team an update on the properties that came in the day before, and the team adds those to their list. The Scottish Government sends a property check sheet with an exhaustive list of what needs to be checked. The team has started and is completing checks, and we run the enhanced disclosure alongside that. We are trying to do both at the same time.

We prioritise people who have said that their guests have their visas and are travelling and that they know the arrival date. Sometimes, we have been contacted by families that are hosting to say that their family has already arrived. The data might arrive on the same day, so we have people in properties that we have not checked. We are not in control of that and have not been able to start the disclosure process. That has been challenging.

We are able to get ahead in some situations, so that everything is done and all the boxes are ticked before the families arrive. However, until we get the data, we cannot start property checks and enhanced disclosures, which is a challenge for us.

**Donald Cameron:** This might be an impossible question to answer because of all the variables that you described but, if everything goes to plan, what kind of timeframe are we talking about between an application being made and all the boxes being ticked? The answer might be, “How long is a piece of string?”

**Hazel Chisholm:** Unfortunately, it is a bit of a case of, “How long is a piece of string?”. It depends on where the property is and how far somebody has to travel to get to it. If we can get the data for a property in Inverness, which is quite close, on, say, a Monday, it could probably be done within a week if we have the staff to do it. I believe that the enhanced disclosure checks have been expedited, so they are coming back very quickly. However, it is still hard to predict.

In an ideal world, it might take a week if everything was in place, but I would not like to say that for sure. It is quite hard.

**Donald Cameron:** I understand that.

I turn to Elaine Ritchie for the perspective from Perth and Kinross Council.



**Elaine Ritchie:** We were quite proactive on property checks. Before we got the data on 6 April, we had engaged with a lot of community groups made up of hosts who had matches. We had visited a lot of community groups and given them a lot of advice and assistance regarding property checks. I manage the housing service, so we know what safe and secure housing should look like.

We had already done that and set up a dedicated page on our local authority website, giving lots of information. Similarly to the other local authorities, we get the information on a data sheet. We have developed an online property check form that we send to the hosts for them to complete to gather basic information about their property, which lets us triage the properties that we are going to go and check. The numbers are vast—I have a significant number of properties to check. We triage the properties on the basis of the information that they provide, whether the visas have been granted and whether the people have already arrived.

09:30

We have set up a team of officers and we are taking something similar to a multi-agency approach. We have trained officers to go out and undertake property checks. We are trying to do those within a week. So far, it has been working really well. We have undertaken about 50 property checks and we have more than 100 matches. The properties that we are going out to check are in really good condition. Based on the information that we received, we thought that we would see some things that were not suitable, but most of them are self-contained accommodation or part of larger accommodation where people have access to their own kitchens and bathrooms.

We have had to provide advice and assistance about integrated linked smoke alarms and things like that but, because we have access to grants and information and advice, we can offer support and information. The system has been working fairly well. We are just waiting for further matches to come through.

Similarly to the other local authorities, we are working in tandem with the disclosure checks, which are coming through really quickly. Disclosure Scotland has set up a bespoke team. Hosts need significant support to complete the disclosure forms, because they are quite detailed. Although the property checks take up a lot of time, so does the assistance for hosts to complete all the documentation that is required.

The main challenge that we face relates to the volume. We had a bit of a backlog to begin with, because people did not have visas. Since visas

started to come through, we have been chasing our tail a bit and things are really picking up. Our online form is working really well to help us in triaging the cases so that we are working on who is already here and the safeguarding element.

**Donald Cameron:** Finally, I put that question to Pat Togher. I appreciate that it is a slightly different issue for you, given that you represent a health and social care partnership. Do you have any observations on the practical issues that people face?

**Pat Togher:** The practical issues are those that have already been described: it is about getting the list as quickly as possible. Similarly to the local authorities, we received the list on 8 April and we quickly activated the teams that had been preparing. As an HSCP, we have an asylum bridging health team, which is a key part of the asylum and refugee team. We also have a Glasgow hub meeting, at which the asylum bridging health team and social care staff are represented as well as principal officers from adult protection and child protection, and representatives from the third sector. We are able to mobilise that quite quickly.

The issue is really the pace of the work in relation to the private arrangements that are already in place with sponsors. We have to be very quick to respond and go out to undertake the property checks where guests and sponsors have already made connections. That is our priority. Our list is in excess of 200. We are already out there undertaking property checks. As others have described, the list for the property check is extensive. In Glasgow, we undertake that through our environmental health officers, who have been mobilised to carry out that task. As has been mentioned, Disclosure Scotland is working really well for us, with a really quick turnaround.

At the moment, the challenges are the pace and ensuring that the placements that are already set up are seen as swiftly as possible.

**Donald Cameron:** I have one final question, which is for Gayle Findlay. It is on a slightly different issue, which is any differences that there might be between the supersponsor scheme and the scheme for private individuals applying under the homes for Ukraine system. We learned yesterday from the minister that 570 visas have been granted under the Scottish Government's supersponsor scheme and 1,050 visas have been granted under the private individual route. You touched on that in talking about housing, but are there any other differences in terms of how that is managed?

**Gayle Findlay:** It is potentially quite different because, when a person in Ukraine applies to the Scottish sponsorship scheme, they are putting the

Scottish Government as their host, so they do not have an address to go to when they first arrive in the country. We will use the relevant welcome hub and associated accommodation, depending on which port of entry they use, to initially triage people to make sure that they do not have any emergency needs but also to complete forms about their housing needs.

There is a stop-gap that does not appear in the homes for Ukraine scheme, in that people will have a few days in accommodation while they are matched to a property. That property portfolio will consist of social housing as well as hosting offers, through the expressions of interest. The difference there is that we can reject a hosting offer before somebody is matched into a placement, so a lot of those safeguarding concerns that we have around the homes for Ukraine scheme are mitigated.

The welcome hubs are intended to act as a very short-term stay for people while we gather their information and make the best match for them before they are moved on to properties in local authority areas across Scotland. They will then receive support from local authorities to integrate and settle into their new homes, whether that is a hosting placement or a social housing placement.

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** My question is for Gayle Findlay, and is about the response of local authorities to volunteers. You have already explained something about that relationship and the work that local authorities are doing. Are you picking up on a hunger for information from the volunteers, from any source? I think that the Home Office has provided quite limited acknowledgements of those offers of help. Clearly, local authorities are doing their best to get around all the people and to check houses. Is there a bit of frustration among volunteer hosts that they do not seem to have heard much back from the Home Office? Certainly, some people have been in touch to put that point to me.

**Gayle Findlay:** There is quite a lot of confusion, because the Home Office has a very small role in the process and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is running the scheme. The Home Office is in charge of the visas and the DLUHC is in charge of the scheme, as it were.

There is frustration, because that is a nuance that people who are new to all this might not understand, and most hosts have never engaged in any such work before. Also, there is very little information in general for people, because we are working at pace; we are almost retrofitting systems to a scheme that has already been established.

In Scotland, there are several routes to which we can direct people for more general hosting support. In particular, the Scottish Refugee Council is funded to support hosts and do some

initial work with them on understanding what hosting is, what they might have to do and some of the experiences that their families may encounter when they arrive.

Also, as Elaine Ritchie mentioned, local authorities are talking to hosts and trying to explain what might be expected of them. Hosting has not happened routinely in the UK. There are small pockets of it, particularly where asylum seekers have lost their accommodation because their claim is still going through a process but has been rejected. The experience of hosting is not a widely known facet in this work, so there is a bit of a learning curve for a lot of people around it.

With the Scottish sponsorship scheme, we hope that there will be broader third sector support for the hosts alongside the work that local authorities will do because, capacity-wise, local authorities will be unable to support hosts and Ukrainians across the numbers that we are expecting.

Local authorities are receiving a huge number of inquiries from hosts about where their family's visas are, when they will be checked and all that kind of stuff, but local authorities are unable to answer a lot of that and have to direct people back to the DLUHC helpline.

**Alasdair Allan:** You mentioned housing. Will you say a bit more about the situation that some local authorities, and presumably housing associations, are in with regard to putting a figure on the number of houses that may be available? That is certainly something that hosts have asked me about. They are happy to be hosts, but they are not always entirely clear on how many houses might eventually be made available. Is COSLA beginning to put figures on that for all local authority areas?

**Gayle Findlay:** The picture is complex at the moment. The Scottish Government has a list of around 18,000 expressions of interest in hosting. That includes a range of people who, four weeks ago, saw something on the news and felt compelled to say that they would like to help, but some may have reflected on that and decided that hosting is not for them and that they want to volunteer in another way. There is a whole process around triaging the information and whittling it down to the real offers as well as doing all the checks and making sure that the properties and hosts are suitable.

There is an element of not knowing the gap until we know what the number of offers is. At the moment, we do not have a sense of whether the 18,000 will whittle down to 2,000 or 8,000. Also, hosts have to offer for only six months so, in six months' time, we might be back in a situation in which lots of people are facing the need to find a

new place to live. However, that is further down the line.

All 32 local authorities have committed to providing social housing where they can, but you will be aware that local authorities are under immense pressure from their homelessness lists and other humanitarian protection schemes. Local authorities committed to participating in the Afghan scheme; we still have more than 12,000 people in hotels across the UK and more people are arriving seeking refuge through those schemes.

Also, you might be aware that the UK Government has just informed local authorities that it will be widening dispersal of asylum across all local authority areas, which will place a further demand on homelessness routes once people have a positive decision. You are correct that, at this time, we are unable to say that there will be X number of social housing units, and that includes a mixture of registered social landlords and local authorities. However, we know that local authorities will be and are able to commit properties.

We have not got the arrivals through the Scottish sponsorship schemes. Your colleague just mentioned that a number of visas have been issued, but the number of people who are arriving in Scotland on the sponsorship scheme is very small. Therefore, until demand rises, local authorities will be hesitant to put in properties, because they could use them for something else and then bring another property on at the other end of the scheme. I have no doubt that local authorities will step up, but they will not be able to provide the numbers that will be required for the scheme, because we just do not have that number of properties in social housing.

**Alasdair Allan:** Hazel Chisholm mentioned some of the challenges that rural local authorities face in assessing houses that have been volunteered and so on. Can you say a bit more about what kind of work is being done or needs to be done to plan the support that will be needed for families once they arrive and the challenges that rural areas might face in doing that?

**Hazel Chisholm:** We are reaching out through our charities and a lot of volunteer bodies who are making themselves well known to us. We already work with well-established volunteering organisations throughout Highland, and there is a swell of good will towards supporting the humanitarian effort. People who cannot host are keen to get involved. I have started working with our ward managers to identify groups and committees in rural communities who are willing to set up welcome events and provide mini welcome hubs.

09:45

I am working to support the areas that we know families will come to. I think that that will work well. We have a strategy group for Ukraine and we will have a sub-group that will be tied into our third sector organisations and volunteering. We can pull together that community effort, which is what we are doing at the moment. There is a lot of good will in Highland to support Ukrainians. People want to do that and want to make a success of it. We do not want people going into rural communities, finding a lack of support and deciding that they need to go somewhere else or to present as homeless in cities such as Inverness.

We are working with our third sector and tapping into voluntary offers of support. Our team is looking at Facebook, where a number of groups have sprung up, and is helping to match people who have offered their homes but who have not made a match. There is a lot of good work going on. A lot of churches want to provide support and to be hubs. We are reaching out to local community groups, which will be invaluable in making a success of resettling Ukrainians in Highland.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I will follow on from Dr Allan's first question. I represent Argyll and Bute and have been out and about in the constituency in the past couple of weeks. We have heard a lot about individuals offering accommodation. I am interested in any work that you are doing with businesses. A number of hospitality businesses have written to me to say that they have accommodation and would love to welcome Ukrainians and that they can also offer them work. What have local authorities been doing to connect with businesses that can offer a warm welcome?

**Gayle Findlay:** Businesses and community groups are currently unable to offer to take part in the scheme, which is only for individual, private hosts. That applies to both the Scottish sponsorship and homes for Ukraine schemes.

There are concerns about people being placed in employment accommodation with an expectation that they will work for their rent. Some Ukrainians may choose to do that when they are here, which would be absolutely fine as long as the pay and conditions are acceptable. There is a lot of concern about ensuring that people are not exploited. There is no expectation that a Ukrainian will pay rent when they live with a host and we would expect the same from businesses. At the moment, that route is not allowed.

I know that the UK Government is looking at how it could work with businesses and, more importantly, community groups such as the YMCA that might be able to offer properties. Concerns

about exploitation and modern slavery are probably overriding those routes at the moment. Although we will probably need to look at every possible option, business may not be our top priority, because of those concerns.

However, I think that the Scottish Government will look to engage with reputable employers. It has already looked at employment opportunities. Once people have arrived in the country, they might be given the option to work as a next step. People will have three years' leave to remain, but their initial accommodation with a host is only for six months. Employment is one of the next steps that should be explored.

**Jenni Minto:** That is very helpful—thank you very much, Gayle. Do any of the local authority representatives have anything to add to that?

**Hazel Chisholm:** Individuals have reached out to us to ask about this. A lot of seasonal workers come to Highland to work in hotels in particular. That has been impacted by Covid and perhaps by changes in rules in relation to Brexit. Managers have asked whether we can work with them to bring Ukrainians to work in hotels. We have had to say that, unfortunately, there is no mechanism to do that at the moment. There is a bit of concern about seasonal work, specifically. If it ends, what do those people do, where do they live and where do they get employment? There is concern about potential abuse of the situation. We have just had to say that that is not available.

Somebody contacted us and said that a group of people had registered for the supersponsorship route and wanted to employ people through that, but things did not go hand in hand. People sometimes confuse the supersponsorship route and the homes for Ukraine route. We continually have to explain to businesspeople who contact us that there is no mechanism at the moment to bring people, unfortunately. We have had queries for potential seasonal work but, until something is developed, we just say, "No, that is not something that we can entertain."

There is a lot of will to bring people over here for work, but there is nothing that we can assist with at the moment in that regard.

**Elaine Ritchie:** I will echo some points that Gayle Findlay has raised. We have engaged with local business and our hospitality sector, particularly regarding the employment offer, rather than accommodation. Our main focus is getting people into Perth and Kinross and getting them settled, ensuring that they are safe and secure. We are focusing on children and their enrolment in school and with general practices and so on. Employment will come if required.

Going back to the points that have just been raised, I think that it is a matter of communication,

keeping the dialogue open and engaging with local businesses. We are doing that. However, as I have made clear, our initial focus is on getting people safe, secure and settled, and then considering employment further down the line.

**Jenni Minto:** I was very interested to hear about the meeting of local authority chief executives. I am interested to know how you are learning from what you are each doing, and whether that has changed how you have been operating.

You are on my screen just now, Ms Ritchie, so I direct that question to you first.

**Elaine Ritchie:** Yes, we are learning from each other. Things are happening at pace. We have not worked like this before, and this is different from our other resettlement schemes. There are some elements of practice that we can adopt, and quite a lot of local authorities are coming together. COSLA is facilitating weekly meetings, as is the Scottish Government, so we are meeting on a weekly basis. From the Perth and Kinross perspective, other local authorities are close to us—Dundee and Angus—and we are working together and sharing knowledge and services. We are considering joining services up, particularly for volunteers and communities. A lot of work is being done, there is a lot of practice and we are learning from one another. A lot of collaboration is going on between local authorities.

**Jenni Minto:** Ms Chisholm, you have talked about working with third sector organisations, and I am sure that there was a lot of learning from the Covid recovery and resilience groups that were set up across Scotland. I would be interested if you could expand on that at all.

**Hazel Chisholm:** You are quite right about Covid. We are pleased to have tapped into a lot of groups that were set up for Covid, and we have worked on good practice with those involved. We called back those people who had been actively involved with those groups, and said, "Right, this is what we need to do." That worked really well.

We are working closely with other local authorities, and we are definitely sharing good practice and good ideas with each other. COSLA has been excellent, keeping us up to date and sharing things, with regular emails and meetings. It has been very available when we have had questions. COSLA has been great, especially when we were waiting for funding advice and guidance to be sent through.

If nothing else, it has allowed us to build on what we had before with resettlement but, as this is a new kind of resettlement, we need to use each other's learning and work closely together. That has definitely enhanced the working across the Scottish Government.

**Jenni Minto:** Pat Togher, do the health and social care partnerships across Scotland have a similar co-ordinated approach?

**Pat Togher:** Yes. We have set up a fortnightly arrangement across the whole of greater Glasgow and Clyde and all the local authorities associated with that area. That is about sharing best practice. Glasgow City Council has been a dispersal local authority for 22 years and is considerably experienced in the resettlement programme for Afghans and Syrians, so we are sharing everything from assessment templates to experience, processes and systems.

Where necessary, we host a service centrally. I touched on the role of the asylum bridging health team that we have in Glasgow. They are significantly experienced in that area of work.

As we move forward, that discussion will pay significant dividends for all of us.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** It has been really good hearing the answers to the questions thus far from members of the panel.

I will ask about support for people who have made it to Scotland. It is complicated for many people to arrive here. As one of the witnesses said, we have 18,000 expressions of interest from people who are prepared to host refugees from Ukraine. I am conscious that a lot of the people who have been in touch have already improved or decorated their housing and bought new furniture to be ready for people.

One of the witnesses said that there is an issue with what happens when the match is not right. I want to explore that. It will not be easy for everybody to do the work of hosting a family once they have arrived. What follow-up work is being done to check that matches have worked? If they do not work for whatever reason, the family or person does not automatically become homeless. I have spoken to Afghan and Syrian refugees recently, some of whom are still homeless years after arriving, particularly Syrian refugees.

I ask Gayle Findlay to pick up that question from an overall COSLA perspective first.

**Gayle Findlay:** The checks that local authorities are undertaking will mitigate any safeguarding concerns but, as you reflected, hosting will not work for everybody, because hosting strangers in your house for a period can be extremely difficult. It could be something as simple as the Ukrainian family arriving, finding that the host has pets and being unable stay because they are allergic to pets. It can be basic things rather than relationship breakdown.

We hope that, dependent on agreement from the UK Government, where a relationship or hosting arrangement is not able to continue,

people will be able to remain in the Scottish sponsorship scheme and be rematched with another family or, if it was social housing, another tenancy. That would mean that they would not drop out of the system but, at the moment, we are not able to do that because the UK Government has not agreed it. Because it is a swapping of host and of visa schemes, it has to be agreed.

The conversations seem to be moving in the right direction and we hope that there will be a resolution to that fairly soon so that people are able to move back into the sponsorship scheme whichever route they came in by so that they are not being put into the homelessness route. None of us feels that that is the appropriate route for people to go into when there is a scheme established and there will be support from local authorities, the third sector and community groups for them.

**Sarah Boyack:** It is really useful to get feedback on that. It needs to happen because, as you say, it is not necessarily about people falling out. It is just a reality check. It could be about the food that is eaten if somebody is vegan, for example, and all the other things that cannot necessarily be predicted before people arrive.

10:00

The other issue that I wanted to ask about was safeguarding, not just for an initial matching process but for follow-ups. What support will be there for families? I am thinking particularly about people who have come from Ukraine having experienced sexual abuse, or who have had contact with traffickers because of the length of time that it has taken for them to get to safety. What follow-up work is being done to provide support—for example, mental health support—as well as making sure that there are not just checks carried out once by Disclosure Scotland but a follow-up process for people?

**Gayle Findlay:** Yes, so—

**Sarah Boyack:** If you want to keep going on that one, Gayle Findlay—

**Gayle Findlay:** Sorry, I did not mean to talk across you. Local authorities are experienced at working with refugees. They have systems—which will be different across all 32 local authority areas and health boards—to support people who have experienced trauma, sexual exploitation and trafficking, so they will be tapping into those partnerships at a local level. Local authorities and their partners will be taking different approaches but, as part of the scheme, the local authorities are expected to provide on-going integration support. Dealing with some of the difficult issues that you have mentioned will form part of that and will be a priority for local authorities.

In addition, the Scottish Government has set up specific work around trauma-informed practice, and a trafficking group, to make sure that those supports have a national reach, because, as you will be aware, some services tend to be centred around Edinburgh and Glasgow, just because the demand is stronger there. They are looking at how they can expand that and support practitioners on the ground in all the different partners, whether that is in the local authorities, the health boards, or the voluntary sector.

Local authorities are experienced and have done this with many refugee groups. Although the experience of the Ukrainian citizens is very recent, it will in some ways reflect that of many refugees who have already been hosted by local authorities. That experience is helpful when it comes to supporting them. It will be different in each area, due to the fact that there are different services and different ways of operating.

**Sarah Boyack:** Is a gendered analysis taking place to review that work? That is one of the suggestions that has been made by JustRight Scotland, given the particular experience that we are aware of in terms of trafficking and of sexual abuse that people might have experienced in-country before they leave.

**Gayle Findlay:** The trafficking group will pick that up. JustRight Scotland is part of that group. A trafficking committee is part of the gold-silver-bronze structure that I mentioned earlier, and it will pick that up, as far as I understand. I am not personally involved in that group, but I know that colleagues will be involved in that.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a follow-up question for Pat Togher about supporting people once they have arrived. Again, it is using the experience of previous refugees—in particular, people from Afghanistan and Syria whom I met recently. They still have challenges in accessing national health service support.

It is not just about post-traumatic stress disorder or trauma from the experience of having to become a refugee. In particular, some of the Ukrainian refugees are older people or people with underlying health conditions that they had before they became refugees, so there is an issue about how to provide support in the short term through access to medicines and the immediate and ongoing medical support that somebody needs. They might not have had that support for four weeks. How do we then get them fitted into our NHS system, which is already under pressure? Are the processes clear for that? People have expressed concerns that it is difficult for people, linguistically, to work out what they are meant to do and how to get that support once they have arrived.

**Pat Togher:** First, I will answer the question about the short term. Some of this has been described earlier in covering the supersponsorship scheme. It happens at arrival in the hub hotels. We have greater control and greater influence over that because, in Glasgow, we have deployed our asylum bridging health team to the hotel, so immediate health needs are met. Any prescriptions and medications that are required can be provided at that point. For prescribing, we have access to general practitioners and to advanced nurse practitioners.

We also have a complex needs service that was stood up in Glasgow during Covid that can provide some in-reaching capacity to the hotel. We are well prepared for people who require immediate treatment and medication when they arrive, and that preparation includes temporary registration with GPs for the duration of their stay in the hotel, and the hopefully short period of time until they are matched.

In the longer term, it will depend on how well we integrate people within the community and on community connectedness. We have been quite successful with that interface, and if there have been issues in relation to it, I have not heard of them, and certainly not recently. We will continue to check in with Syrians and Afghan, as well as following-up with the Ukrainians as they arrive to make sure that they experience as warm a welcome and as established and integrated a process as possible.

Universal services such as local GP registration and local education registration will kick once the guest is accommodated with their sponsor. The interface with the third sector groups that are also available to support that and the standing up of additional translation serviced in Glasgow will also be deployed.

We are certainly geared up and prepared in the short term through drawing on our experience. In the longer term, it will be about connectedness to localities. There will undoubtedly be challenges, given the scale of what we anticipate will happen here.

**Sarah Boyack:** The other issue is monitoring. There will be an initial wave of people, but ongoing issues, such as PTSD, could emerge afterwards. Help for such issues might not be immediately available. Support might be needed for the host and for the family that has come to Scotland. Have you got systems in place to keep an eye on that?

**Pat Togher:** Yes. I am glad that you have picked up on that. Our experience is that such issues are not immediately apparent. There is a risk in jumping in with that type and level of support. As was discussed earlier, we know from

experience that the absolute priorities for people are that they feel settled and secure, and that their essential needs are met immediately. We are good at doing that.

We acknowledge that PTSD can kick in later. The timing of help for that must be right. That is critical. Most of our services in Glasgow are trauma-informed, and the asylum team and bridging health team are there to signpost people to other services as and when they require them.

**Sarah Boyack:** Thank you. That is really useful.

I have a final question for Elaine Ritchie and Hazel Chisholm about the challenge that you talked about of working on the ground—going to people's houses or wherever. What translation support are you putting in place? I am guessing that going from zero to having the capacity to translate everything will be quite a challenge. How are you coping with that and what resources are being put in to make sure that people make a successful transition?

**Elaine Ritchie:** That is a very good question. We have had to put in additional resources, so we have increased our translation services. We learned from our previous resettlement schemes that we needed to do that, as well as translating a lot of our key documents. We have done that already; it happened quite slowly during previous processes. We are currently going through a procurement process to increase our translation services.

On Ms Boyack's point about follow-up checks, a welfare check once the person is settled is key. We are ensuring that staff have access to translation services and have devices that allow them to translate when they are with individuals. We are looking for additional services, particularly through the Scottish Refugee Council, which has recruited people who speak Ukrainian and Russian to support us. We have identified that taking down the language barrier straight away in order to allow people to feel safe and to ask for the support and assistance that they need is a key priority. We have enhanced our translation services, and we will follow up with welfare checks.

**Sarah Boyack:** Pat Togher made the point that, initially, people might not say exactly what their circumstances are, so this is about how we connect with them afterwards and having translation capacity. Hazel, how are you moving ahead with that? I presume that it will be quite a challenge.

**Hazel Chisholm:** It definitely is. It was suggested that we would have to do that work with all our staff throughout Highland Council. We already have some Ukrainians in the Highlands, so we will reach out and ask whether they are

willing to step forward as translators or help if there are families in their area.

We know that there is a need for interpretation services. We sometimes struggled to find local translators to help in the Afghan resettlement scheme, but we did not struggle as much with the Syrian resettlement scheme. We are translating our documents, and we will work with the Scottish Refugee Council to access services that it provides.

We are not at the stage of carrying out welfare checks; we are very much at the beginning of the process. We will ensure that staff are able to access interpretation services, even if that is on a tablet or other hand-held device. The feedback that we have received suggests that young people from Ukraine tend to speak good enough English, but that is not so much the case with older people and children. The ability to communicate depends on the make-up of the household. If a household includes somebody who is in their 20s or 30s, they will probably be able to communicate in English, but we cannot rely on that, so we are looking to upskill our staff and provide devices to assist us with interpretation.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is very helpful.

**The Convener:** I invite Maurice Golden, who joins us remotely, to ask his questions.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Thank you, convener. I have a specific question and a more general question for the witnesses. Earlier in the meeting, Gayle Findlay mentioned refugee pets. Commercial imports of pets have been suspended to allow for management and quarantine spaces to be focused on refugee pets. Although we recognise that it is important that humans are welcomed here in Scotland, pets can be very much part of the family. Is that system working smoothly? How many refugee pets are being accommodated?

**Gayle Findlay:** I am afraid that I do not have figures for you. I know that a handful of pets were successfully put into quarantine, under the laws of the country, as people arrived through Cairnryan port. The Ukraine scheme is very different from previous refugee schemes, under which people were not able to bring pets into the country. Obviously, if people arrive via airlines, they are unlikely to bring their family pet with them. However, there are lots of overland routes to Scotland, so there is a need for local authorities, Border Force staff and whoever else is involved to ensure that there are such spaces. The Scottish Government has issued guidance on how the issue is to be handled. As you said, spaces have been made available to accommodate arrivals through that route.

**Maurice Golden:** If the other witnesses have anything to say about refugee pets, they should feel free to chime in, but I will move on to my more general question, which we have already touched on. Do local authorities have the resources that are required to support Ukrainians? Have you identified gaps? I ask Gayle Findlay to answer first, again.

10:15

**Gayle Findlay:** At the moment, no funding instructions have been issued for the homes for Ukraine scheme or the Scottish sponsorship scheme—the issue is still in negotiation. However, we are working on the basis that there will, as there has been with each resettlement scheme, be a tariff attached to each person in order to help local authorities to meet costs. Obviously, local authorities have mentioned some of the significant costs.

There are a couple of areas where the situation is different. At the moment, there is no money for additional healthcare costs, whereas money for that is normally attached. Obviously, it is for our health service colleagues to argue for that, but it is also a concern for local authorities, because if health services are not available in the area, they cannot successfully support people to integrate.

The welcome hubs are a new element in refugee resettlement; currently, there is no funding agreement for those, either. We are aware that funding will be available, but we do not know what it will actually look like, which makes it hard for local authorities and their partners to plan.

Local authorities have been given some additional funding from the Scottish Government—a one-off grant—to support resettlement teams through continued employment of staff and to bring properties up to standard. The funding is for repairs and renovations or for equipping houses in ways that local authorities would not otherwise have funds for. That one-off grant is separate from the funding tariff that will be attached to arrivals in local authority areas.

Does that answer your question?

**Maurice Golden:** Yes—that is very helpful.

I ask Pat Togher to talk about resources and any gaps that he might have identified.

**Pat Togher:** Gaps will emerge as we move along. We have quite well-established structures and we have resources in place, but it looks as though that will change, because we will be required to move with the change in demand. To go back to the questions about follow-up visits and follow-up safeguarding arrangements, undertaking all that will require additional resources.

As has been pointed out, moneys are proposed, but we have yet to see the finer detail and how the proposals will translate into reality. At the moment, some money is available for enhancing the resource, but it is non-recurring money, so we have the obvious challenges that are associated with that. It will take us only to the end of the current financial year, which makes it difficult to recruit staff. Nonetheless, the money will assist us in some way.

There are a lot of challenges. Some of them are financial, but they are also about making sure that we can deal with the demand that comes our way.

**Hazel Chisholm:** I echo Gayle Findlay's point about the lack of funding guidance. We find it difficult to plan when we do not have that information.

However, based on previous resettlement schemes, the concern for us is about support for people in rural communities. Currently, our Afghan resettlement scheme is going well, but the challenge for the Afghan families further north, particularly for their health needs, is that they have an almost six-hour return journey to Raigmore hospital. That presents a real challenge, especially for pregnant women. We do not know until people arrive, but if we have pregnant women it will take them a whole day to access midwife and scanning appointments at Raigmore. Our Afghan families have found that really challenging, but there is not much that we can do. If services are not available locally, people will have to travel. That is a cost to them, and we do not know whether the funding will support that cost.

Tuberculosis screening has been done previously for resettlements. That might be needed, particularly for children. Sometimes, we find that quite challenging and services are not always available to do it. We are still catching up on TB screening from our previous Afghan resettlement.

Funding for health, particularly in our rural communities, is proving to be a challenge, especially because we are so geographically spread out in Highland. However, our strategy group meets regularly and is doing all that it can to put contingencies in place to address the challenges that will come to us, based on our experience of previous resettlements.

**Maurice Golden:** Thank you for that. That is helpful.

Is the situation similar in Perth and Kinross?

**Elaine Ritchie:** Yes, the situation is very similar to what Gayle Findlay and Hazel Chisholm just outlined. The lack of clarity about funding makes planning difficult. However, the Scottish Government identified £11 million, which has been



shared among the 32 local authorities. We have used that pot of money to put in place fixed-term posts because we had been using resources from our current services, which are heavily stretched—in particular, our homelessness services and welfare rights teams.

The one-off grant was really welcome, but we need clarification about the funding in order to allow us to resource the service—not only to provide welfare checks, safeguarding and follow-up, but to support communities. There is a lot of goodwill, but if we do not support communities, it will fall on local authorities to pick that up, so it is really important that we get support out into communities.

**The Convener:** I will ask about a group that already experiences a significant amount of discrimination: the Traveller community. We know that there is a large population of Romany Travellers in Ukraine and a proportion of them should come through on the visa programmes. Are the local authorities' specialist services in that area ready to engage with families that come from that community?

**Gayle Findlay:** We have been made aware of that issue more broadly across the UK. One of the challenges that the Traveller community here faces is that the accommodation that they can provide is not considered to be appropriate under the homes for Ukraine visa scheme.

In the team in which I work in COSLA, we have a policy manager and officer who are working on that. We are working with the Traveller community to ensure that, if there are any issues, we raise them. At the moment, it does not seem to be a significant issue in Scotland, although I do not doubt that it might change. Therefore, we are making sure that there are channels of communication for the community to report to us, so that we can raise policy issues, because if people in Ukraine want to come to be with their friends and family here, we should facilitate that however we can, whether or not they are from the Traveller community.

**Pat Togher:** As you might be aware, convener, we have specialist services in Glasgow, particularly for the Romany community. We will continue to draw from that service's expertise and skills. As Gayle Findlay pointed out, it remains a work in progress that we will need to address as and when situations arise.

**Elaine Ritchie:** We have quite a large population from the Traveller community in Perth and Kinross, so we have a lot of specialist services already in place. We have not experienced any issues, but we are keeping a watching brief: we are keeping our colleagues alerted and we are monitoring the situation.

**Hazel Chisholm:** I echo what my colleagues said. We have a strong Traveller community in Highland and a dedicated team who work with and support them. We are keeping awareness of communication with Romany communities that are willing to relocate from Ukraine, but I am not aware of that having happened yet.

**The Convener:** Do the witnesses wish to raise anything with the committee that we have not covered in the questions? I see no indication that anyone wants to come in, which I take as a good thing. I thank them for attending. It has been really helpful.

We move into private session for the final agenda item.

10:25

*Meeting continued in private until 10:50.*



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba