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Convenor of the Constitution, Europe, External
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Sent by email:
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07 March 2023

Dear Convener,

At my appearance before the committee on 9 February, I said I would follow up in writing on the progress that has been made to implement the 16 interventions that were identified as part of the review of the Super Sponsor Scheme published in November.

Almost 23,600 displaced people from Ukraine have arrived in the UK with a Scottish Sponsor and over 19,100 of them have arrived through our Super Sponsor Scheme. The scheme opened on 18 March 2022 and owing to the surge in applications, I took the difficult decision to pause the scheme to new applications on 13 July 2022. This was to ensure that we would be able to meet the demand for short-term accommodation for those who already had a visa.

When I paused the scheme, I instructed my officials to conduct a review of the super sponsor scheme with a focus on longer-term accommodation and sustainability. This was led by the Chief Social Policy Adviser, Professor Linda Bauld with broad input from a range of stakeholders and was published on 1 November 2022.

The interventions identified by the report range from clearer information and support to investment in social housing, testing alternatives to short-term accommodation such as modular housing and actions to reduce barriers to employment and PRS.

In **Annex A** I set out the progress that has been made over the past three months on implementing these. I am pleased that I can report firm progress against all interventions. In particular, we have taken swift action to ensure that displaced people from Ukraine are warmly welcomed with suitable accommodation, along with information, advice and support services to enable them to settle quickly in Scotland.

Since December, daily arrival numbers have been consistently low and we are now at the stage where we can say that the considerable efforts of Scottish Government, local authorities and the third sector have contributed towards the successful delivery of short-term

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accommodation for those arriving from Ukraine on the Super Sponsor Scheme. As you are aware, this has required us to adopt new and novel approaches such as the chartering of the two passenger ships and to re-deploy significant resources to ensure the success of the programme.

I am clear that our priority over the coming months is to deliver on the medium and longer-term interventions that are required to enable us to offer longer-term accommodation and the opportunities of full integration to the nearly 23,600 displaced people from Ukraine already in the UK with a Scottish sponsor and who choose to remain here longer-term.

It goes without saying that there are few quick wins here, and with a shortage of affordable housing across Scotland, a cost-of-living crisis and significant pressures on both local and national Government finances, the scale of the challenge is significant.

The review of the Super Sponsor Scheme developed a set of seven criteria to ensure any plan to reopen the scheme is safe and deliverable (**see Annex B**). Following the pause in July, this was reviewed by the Ukraine Programme Board in late October and has been reviewed again at their meeting this week. I can confirm that I have accepted their recommendation that the scheme continues to remain closed to new applications. This will be reviewed again in three months' time.

The decision was informed by an assessment of the criteria which concluded that six of the seven conditions for a safe re-opening cannot be met at this time. The only criteria that we consider has been met is number three which states that 'displaced people can access information and advice about relevant services and support'. The other six relate to the supply of longer-term accommodation, suitable funding and the ability of local government to cope with the additional pressures that re-opening the scheme would generate.

As of 14 February, there were an estimated 6,200 people in Welcome Accommodation (including those on ships). Almost 8,700 displaced people from Ukraine have used hosted/matched accommodation (almost 4,400 individual and almost 4,300 super sponsor).

There are record levels of homeless households in temporary accommodation across Scotland and a limited provision of social housing. There are also barriers to displaced people from Ukraine in accessing private rented accommodation.

The £50 million Ukraine Longer Term Resettlement Fund is providing capital funding to local authorities and registered social landlords to bring back into use void properties and acquire additional homes. This cumulative investment of around £10m this year (and £2.6m next year) will help to bring more than 750 homes back into use - with over 400 of these already complete. A further pipeline of potential projects has been identified but will not be sufficient to meet the housing need levels currently in Welcome Accommodation.

In addition, local authorities are experiencing increased demand due to homelessness and the widening of asylum dispersal to local authorities across Scotland (previously Glasgow was the only dispersal area in Scotland). This comes at a time when the UK Government has cut funding tariffs for Ukrainian arrivals.

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I hope this information is helpful in explaining my priorities for the programme over the coming months and why re-opening the scheme is not feasible at this time. I will continue to keep the committee and the parliament updated on this work.



NEIL GRAY

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Annex A: Implementation of Interventions

Review - Specific Interventions

| Intervention and Timescale | Update |
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| 1. Improved Clarity in Pre-Arrival Communications (Immediate) | Repeated translated and trauma-informed communications to visa-holders to be clear about the pressures on accommodation and need for prioritisation of more vulnerable individuals and families. Arrival rates have slowed considerably. Opportunity to consider 'survey' of those who haven't yet arrived to understand intent, although behaviour changes according to war and local circumstances. |
| 2. Refined Arrival Script and Communications (Immediate) | Improved communications with all visa-holders, arrivals and those in short-term accommodation. Evidence shows less than half of arrivals now accessing accommodation; improved handling plans for the closure of hotels and ships; clear messaging to stakeholders and during one-to-one matching conversations to reinforce key messages. Guidance for people displaced from Ukraine with accompanying stakeholder toolkit in final stages of development. |
| 3. Strengthening of Matching (Immediate) | An offer of additional resources to boost local authority resettlement teams with up to 58 SG contingency staff. Having surveyed need of local authorities, we have recruited 24 staff to support this work, and a further four staff deployed to the national matching service in COSLA. Offer extended to all 32 local authorities. In addition within both MS Victoria and MS Ambition additional SG matching staff deployed to support National matching for the population on the cruise ships. This is in addition to grant funding provided to councils to boost resettlement team capacity. Improvements made to national matching tool, with pilot access to councils. With arrivals slowing, resources have focussed on in-country matching rather than pre-arrival. |
| 4. Social Housing (Immediate) | Capital fund announced by First Minister with more than £10 million agreed this financial and around £2.6 million next year to deliver more than 750 homes across 5 projects. Of these over 400 homes have already been completed. A further eight proposals are in the pipeline and undergoing due diligence. Beyond this we are seeing increasing expressions of interest from councils and RSLs some of which we expect to convert to full applications in the coming weeks |
| 5. Scotland Call for Volunteers (Short-Term) | On 28 November, I launched the new campaign. A digital toolkit has been developed, with videos being added showcasing experience of hosting and being hosted. |
| 6. Greater Emphasis on Employability (Short-Term) | As part of providing support to arrivals in hotels and on-board passenger ships, DWP and local third sector organisations have been providing employability advice and support. Jobs fairs have been held at various locations in Scotland, including Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. ONS research estimates more than half of arrivals surveyed in Scotland in paid employment, and I am |

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| | asking HMRC to share any available operational data to improve our understanding. |
| 7. Local Welcome (Short-Term) | On 22 November, the first Warm Scottish Gathering event took part in Edinburgh, with councils and partners showcasing communities, places and employment opportunities across Scotland. Event feedback showed 80% of attendees had a better understanding of Scotland's cities, towns and villages. As part of the joint disembarkation strategy, focus is now on providing similar sessions on-board MS Ambition with presentations and materials highlighting benefits of various parts of Scotland. |
| 8. National Approach to Re-Matching (Short-Term) | As host arrangements come to a natural conclusion, or end due to change in circumstances, guests are triaged and given help to agree alternative accommodation such as further host arrangement, support into Private rental market or entering short-term accommodation. We expect the scale of this will grow as private arrangements mature in waves depending on arrival or placement date. |
| 9. Refinement of Accommodation Offer (Short-Term) | From 5 December, concessionary lunches and snacks have no longer been provided in hotels or on-board passenger ships. Breakfast and dinner service has continued to be provided free of charge with all welcome accommodation continuing to offer paid-for-lunch provision. As part of continuing to refine the accommodation offer, work is underway to with local government to finalise a clear operational policy for vacated rooms and left luggage before moving on to consideration of 'refusals policy' which could include consideration of a service charge as used in Wales. |
| 10. Warm Welcome Grant | Officials considering the feasibility and deliverability of this intervention. Feedback from the Ukraine Delivery Board identified concerns, including parity with existing communities; local authority feedback points to a lack of capacity and administrative barriers. While a one-off grant may assist in terms of improving access to deposits, the pressure on private rental sector remains with demand outstripping supply, and many landlords commanding large waiting lists and able to select tenants with more robust references or credit histories. Officials are working with the Association of Local Authority Council Housing Officers and PRS sector. |
| 11. Private Rental Assistance (Medium-Term) | ONS data suggests 17% of arrivals in the UK renting privately, with most common barrier to access lack of references or guarantor. Officials know some local authorities already operate a form of rental assistance or guarantor scheme. We are working closely with the Association of Local Authority Council Housing Officers and others to improve understanding of these schemes against the scale of the challenge and present options, and explore how we build on the support already in place at a local authority level. This is a UK-wide challenge with the potential for sharing evidence and lessons across governments. |

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| <p>12. Self-Matching Infrastructure (Medium-Term)</p> | <p>The Digital Transformation Division is focussed on developing a 'data ecosystem' to hold relevant data for the Warm Scots Welcome with two key elements 'matching' and 'volunteer hosting'. Work is also being taken forward to support the development of a 'property check' platform to improve tracking, monitoring and reporting. Work to deliver innovation in 'self-matching' is therefore at a very early stage due. However, events such as 'Warm Scottish Gathering' have been delivered demonstrating potential of in-person matching. In addition, 10 Local Authorities have supported events and matching on board MS Ambition encouraging guests to consider matching opportunities in their areas. Further a pilot is underway with Positive Action in Housing to support 3rd sector matching to hosts which will run until March 2024.</p> |
| <p>13. Modular Housing (Medium-Term)</p> | <p>Scottish Government is working closely with Angus Council on a potential modular pilot and also with Dumfries & Galloway Council to identify the suitability of sites. Officials are working with six councils to consider viability of longer-term options. We continue to work with Palladium, an international organisation specialising in humanitarian responses.</p> |
| <p>14. Approach to Matching (Medium-Term)</p> | <p>Since publication we have consciously shifted focus to provision of staff and resources to support locally-led teams, with a 'digital matching tool' currently piloted by City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City councils. There has also been a widening of governance and delivery, now including third sector organisations and pilot work with Positive Action in Housing.</p> |
| <p>15. Headlease Scheme (Longer-Term)</p> | <p>This intervention is more significant in developmental scoping. Officials are considering mechanisms for a national subletting, or 'headleasing' scheme. This would involve an intermediate body, such as a local authority, renting a building to provide a guaranteed rental income and a tenant management system to the landlord, then subletting to tenants. We continue engagement with local government and national representative bodies to consider a national approach, learning lessons from existing local schemes. While this intervention has a longer-term timeframe attached to it, stakeholders including the PRS have responded positively commenting this could provide a way for landlords to release stock into the market at time many are considering selling or mothballing properties.</p> |
| <p>16. Research and International Best Practice (On-Going)</p> | <p>The Ukraine Programme is increasingly established within a broader policy-making and academic network, especially as we move beyond mass evacuation into integration. Our approach will align to the principles of New Scots – integration; rights-based; person-centred; inclusive and collaborative. The Chair of New Scots is a member of the Ukraine Programme Board with Ukraine officials participating in the New Scots Core Group and associated governance landscape. With support of DEXA, officials are engaging with governments and international organisations (including UN Refugee Agency) to establish Scotland as a global citizen in this humanitarian response and share learning.</p> |

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Annex B: Criteria for re-opening the scheme

The criteria to re-open the scheme is:

- 1) Displaced people already in Scotland are in safe and suitable accommodation.
- 2) Welcome accommodation is available for people who are yet to travel, with a pipeline of longer-term properties available.
- 3) Displaced people can access information and advice about relevant services and support.
- 4) Measures are in place to mitigate pressures on local councils and services.
- 5) Clear understanding of the costs related to re-opening the scheme and confirmation funding is place to cover these.
- 6) Clear understanding of the challenges of re-opening the scheme, and how these will be managed.
- 7) Assessment of the current situation in Ukraine, including unexpected or unforeseen developments in the war leading to mass migration events.

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