



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Thursday 16 June 2022

Session 6



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**Thursday 16 June 2022**

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**CONSTITUTION, EUROPE, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE**  
**16<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:**

Neil Gray (Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine)

Joanna Keating (Scottish Government)

Yevhen Mankovskyi (Ukrainian Consulate in Edinburgh)

Will Tyler-Greig (Scottish Government)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

James Johnston

**LOCATION**

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)



## Scottish Parliament

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

Thursday 16 June 2022

*[The Convener opened the meeting at 08:45]*

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Clare Adamson):** Good morning, and welcome to the 16th meeting in 2022 of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. Donald Cameron joins us remotely this morning.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. Are members content to take item 3 in private?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Crisis in Ukraine

08:45

**The Convener:** Item 2 is the crisis in Ukraine. It will be one of two evidence sessions this morning. I welcome Yevhen Mankovskyi, who is the consul general for the Ukrainian consulate in Edinburgh. Mr Mankovskyi, this is your first time speaking with us in public, but you have spoken with my colleagues before, in private. I think I speak for the whole committee in sending our wishes and solidarity to the Ukrainian people at this time.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi (Ukrainian Consulate in Edinburgh):** Thank you so much. First of all, good morning to all of you. This time, as we are in a public session, I might be a little bit nervous, and I will be more polite and diplomatic. It is a big honour for me to visit the committee for this evidence session, and I appreciate the invitation and you taking the time to do this.

A lot has changed since my previous visit, in both Ukraine and Scotland, with temporarily displaced Ukrainians. I start by saying how much your support means to all of us. It has already been more than 100 days since the Russian full-scale invasion on Ukraine began, and for more than 100 days time has stood still for all Ukrainians throughout the world. Our troops are still defending our country. They are doing their best, and, thanks to the support of the whole democratic world, we are defending our country.

We appreciate all that the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments are doing for people in Ukraine and for those who are temporarily displaced and have come directly to Scotland and the UK. All of them are touched when they see the Ukrainian national colours throughout Scotland, including on Scottish Government buildings, the Kelpies and bridges in Inverness. There are Ukrainian colours everywhere, and the people need that nowadays, so that they can see that we are not alone and that the whole world supports us and is staying with us.

I will stop there, and I am more than happy to answer your questions.

**The Convener:** Thank you. One of our concerns is the safeguarding of and safe passage for refugees and the support for those who come here. I was worried to see an advert on Facebook, which was probably from a well-meaning source, that said a placement had broken down and the person was looking for help. However, having spoken to the minister, I know that the Scottish Government is absolutely adamant that anyone who is in Scotland can seek support—either through the hubs or local authorities—and they will be given support under the supersponsor scheme.

Is there anything that the Scottish Government, local authorities or members could do to emphasise to Ukrainians that support is here and that they do not need to do something that could potentially put them or a family member in danger as a vulnerable person? We want to get the message across that support is available and tell people where to go to get it.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** First, they are not refugees; they are temporarily displaced Ukrainians—that is just a small clarification. To become a refugee, you apply for that status in the nearest bordering country, which, in our case, would be Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Moldova or Romania. Those people are already here, so they have received temporary protection status. We hope that most of them will go back to Ukraine—that is what we want.

On your question about safeguarding, people are receiving all the support that they need. When they arrive in Scotland, there are welcome hubs at Edinburgh airport, Glasgow airport and 249 High Street in Edinburgh, where they receive support and information. When they arrive at the airports, they are temporarily placed in hotels while the Scottish Government looks for a sponsor or accommodation for them.

I must mention that a lot of people—for example, those who are staying in hotels—have said that it would be very useful for them if representatives from the welcome hubs visited them once a week to update them with information. For example, the representatives might say, “We are looking for accommodation; you can receive benefits here or here; and, if you need something, here are telephone numbers and contact details—please don’t hesitate to give us a call”. That would be useful for them, because it is not cheap to take a ride from a hotel or temporary accommodation to the welcome hub and, if they need information or an update, they need to take a ride there and get back to their accommodation.

After the full-scale invasion began, we launched a type of welcome hub in our community centre at 14 Royal Terrace, here in Edinburgh. All Ukrainians who come to Edinburgh can receive full support there. As well as information, they can receive all the necessary supplies from donations of food and clothes—they can get everything there. If they need something, they can follow us on Facebook or look at the website and see all our updates on when there are sessions in the club, which is when they can visit and receive all the necessary information.

We usually hold sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Thursday sessions are especially useful, because we hold drop-in sessions in the club with staff from the Scottish Government, the Home Office, the Department for Work and

Pensions and so on. Staff from all the local authorities come to visit us and help people, which is really useful. We hope that that will continue in June and July and through to September; we need that, because it is really useful for those people.

**The Convener:** We move to questions from the committee.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Thank you for joining us this morning. We know that you are exceptionally busy dealing with casework and supporting people.

The previous time that you came to the committee, we talked about the Ukrainian seasonal workers who are here. At the time, the details of the Ukraine extension scheme were just coming out. I want to get your thoughts on how the scheme has worked. Have people been able to apply for it, have they got their visa extensions and are there any particular forms of advice and support that people still need?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** As we all know, when the war started on 21 February, the UK visas scheme for Ukrainians was launched with a family scheme and a sponsorship scheme and all seasonal workers’ tier 5 visas were automatically extended to the end of the year—until 31 December 2022. They did not need to do anything; they just had to wait until Home Office representatives got in touch with the farmers to clarify all the details. Seasonal workers just knew that their visas had been extended.

However, there is now one more visa scheme—the Ukraine extension scheme—that they can apply for. I can tell that it works and is useful, because, just a few days ago, we made a power of attorney for a couple of seasonal workers—a father and a mother—so that the grandmother can bring the kids from Ukraine to the UK. As far as I understand it, the parents have applied for the extension scheme visa and they can apply for, for example, the supersponsor visa for their kids and the Scottish Government can be the sponsor. The parents can then go to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Moldova or Romania to pick up their kids and bring them here to Scotland. It works; we can see that. I cannot tell you exactly how good the scheme is because I have not seen many cases involving it. However, just a few days ago, I saw that case, and the people were really happy that they had received their biometric residence permit cards, which means that they can now stay in the UK for three years, find a new job and bring their kids here. The most important thing is that they can bring their kids here to a safe place.

**Mark Ruskell:** Are you in contact with employers of seasonal workers? Are there any issues with accommodation, particularly in terms of bringing families over and accommodation

being suitable? Have there been issues with finding suitable accommodation for extended families?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** Unfortunately, I have not spoken to any of the farmers; there has been no occasion to speak to them, because everything is fine. Seasonal workers are staying on farms; they live there or, if they have already received their biometric residence permit—BRP—they can apply for another job. For those who do not want to do that, they can live on the farm and do their job. They are still seasonal workers and they are happy because they are still doing their job, which is why they came to Scotland.

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** First, I thank you for coming here again. I emphasise that the committee has written to the UK Government about seasonal workers; we are very sympathetic to them being on the visa scheme and their applications being processed as quickly as possible.

On a completely different subject, what more do you think that Scotland, its civic society and the Parliament can do to continue to keep the suffering of the Ukrainian people in the public imagination, to ensure that attention does not go away?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** First, I must mention that the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have already done a lot. We really appreciate all the support, but—there is always the small “but”—there are some areas in which we still need support. Perhaps that might be with English classes for people, because that is really important for both adults and kids. Not all Ukrainians can speak English fluently, and there are still a lot of Ukrainians arriving here who do not speak English at all, so they really need such classes.

09:00

Another thing that we need support with is nurseries. That is a very big problem because most of the people who come here are mums with kids, a lot of whom are under the age of five, or even under the age of three. When your kid is three or above, you can receive some benefits and some free hours in a nursery for them. However, if the kid is under three, you must pay and, unfortunately, that is not cheap. Mums do not know what to do in that situation; they really need that support and help so that they can apply for a job, but they cannot do that if their kid is one and a half, two or two and a half. They cannot apply for a nursery place when it is too expensive for them. Support with that would be very useful for us. We have resolved many problems and issues, but nurseries are still a big question for us, and

especially for mums who have come to Scotland and need to take care of their kids.

**Alasdair Allan:** I have a question about another completely different subject. I know that everyone is keen to ensure that Scotland and the UK play their role in economically isolating the aggressor in the war. What are your observations on that? What can we do to ensure that Russia continues to be isolated economically?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** You are absolutely right. The whole world is stopping doing business with Russia. As far as I know, 1,537 companies have already pulled out of or stopped doing business in Russia. We ask the whole world—all businesses—to pull out of Russia and stop trading with that aggressor. It is to do with popularity; if they stop, businesses will receive more profit by opening new markets elsewhere in the world. We still need to show Russia that, if they are going to do such things—invade countries and start wars—in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they cannot be part of the democratic world. That is why we ask the whole world to pull out of Russian markets and stop trading with them.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** It is good to see you. I want to follow up on questions about support from the local community. I have visited the Ukrainian support network, and it is really impressive to see what it is doing on the ground to provide food, advice and even clothes—many people have come with just one small bag, so they are rebooting their lives. What really struck me was meeting two psychologists who had just started supporting people.

My question is about the support that people are getting once they arrive, not just from the Ukrainian community in Edinburgh, which is clearly really strong, but in other parts of Scotland. Are there networks that people can tap into? Is the support mostly in Edinburgh and Glasgow?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** Most of the Ukrainians are in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen; there are some in the Highlands and Dumfries. As far as I know, Edinburgh is already full of Ukrainians, so they are trying to move them to Glasgow or other part of Scotland.

Let us take the example of Edinburgh. When Ukrainians arrive in Scotland at Edinburgh airport, the welcome hub picks them up and drives them to the Royal Bank of Scotland’s Gogarburn house, which is near the airport. There, they receive a welcome backpack, which contains supplies. They receive some benefits—money—but only part of them; they can apply for and receive further benefits in the welcome hub on the High Street in Edinburgh city centre.

If they already have a sponsor, they can receive help to move there, or, if they have applied under

the Scottish Government's supersponsor scheme, they will be moved temporarily to a hotel. As I have already said, it would be useful if some of the welcome hub representatives visited those people in their hotels once a week and gave them some status updates on, say, looking for a sponsor, news of things that have changed and so on.

There are up to 500 Ukrainians in Scotland who have been staying in hotels for one or even two months now. That is okay for those who are alone or who came here on their own—they are happy to be in a safe place at the hotel, they are receiving meals three times a day and so on—but it is not so good for mums with kids. We are trying to help those people on our own but, if it was possible for mums with two or more kids, in particular, to get social housing, that would be very useful. In fact, it is what we really need right now.

I am sorry—I talked about nurseries, but I forgot to mention schools. This has not happened often, but, sometimes, there is a school just five minutes' walk from a family's accommodation, yet, when the mum and kids apply to it, the school rejects them, because it is not in their area; the school that is in their area is actually 30 minutes away by car. I am sorry to say this, but that is just really difficult for those people. In cases where a school is just a five-minute walk away, it would help if there were exemptions for those families, if they could appeal or if things could be extended for them.

I think that that is all that I have to say. Thank you.

**Sarah Boyack:** That was really helpful feedback.

Another challenge that I have clocked is things not working out after people get allocated a host. It is not the fault of the family or the host—it is just that people have different expectations and there is a reality check when people settle in. It could be pets and allergies, food choices or anything else that would normally be taken for granted. It was an issue that I picked up from people who are trying to support Ukrainians—there was a real nervousness about it. My sense is that Ukrainians are so grateful to come here and get support that they do not really want to complain, and there is an issue in how we support Ukrainians, particularly those with kids, when the first match does not work out. Loads of hosts are volunteering, but we need to make sure that we can match people up.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** It is a really difficult question—

**Sarah Boyack:** [*Inaudible.*]—but it is just the feedback that I got, and it seems to be one of the things that we might need to fix.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** Let me tell you a short story. There was a Ukrainian family—a mum and two kids—who already had a host family in Scotland; they had met and talked online, everything was fine and they were happy. The family transited in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. They came to Scotland; they met their host; everything was great; and everybody was happy. The Scottish gentleman then started sending us emails and calling the consulate, asking for help for this Ukrainian family. We did not understand what was going on, so we asked, "What's happened? Why do you need our help?". He explained that, when the family crossed the border in Amsterdam airport, the mum had lost some documents.

The gentleman was just trying to do his best, and he was ready to do everything to help the family to renew their documents. I asked what type of documents had been lost. I talked to the mum, who told me that they had lost their internal Ukrainian passports in Amsterdam. I said to the gentleman that it was okay, that they did not need internal passports in Scotland and the United Kingdom, that those could be renewed when they go back to Ukraine, and that they could contact the lost and found office at Amsterdam airport—perhaps it would find the documents and send them here.

The gentleman was so keen on the family and interested in helping it that he kept ringing the consulate. He typed emails that said "Help us" and that the family had lost their documents. We clarified what kind of documents they had lost, and that was not a big problem. The family will renew them when they go back to Ukraine.

That was amazing. Scottish people are so interested, and they help us so much. They support such families. All that we can say is thank you. That is all.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I want to follow up Sarah Boyack's questioning. We have heard from people who are close to the supersponsor scheme that there are some flaws in it. I am keen to explore your experience of the scheme. For example, you have mentioned 500 or more people staying in a hotel for a month or more. Do you have a sense of where the blockage is? Is there anything that the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities or individual local authorities could do?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** The figure of 500 people who live in a hotel in Scotland for more than a month is approximate. Unfortunately, we do not have direct numbers.

When I talk to Ukrainians who live in a hotel, we do not understand where the problem is in matching host families and Ukrainians who are

already here. People try to do things on their own, but they cannot, and the Scottish Government is looking for a sponsor for them.

We know of cases involving social housing in Glasgow. It was decided that some social housing in Glasgow should be destroyed because it was not okay to live in it any more. However, people in our community in Glasgow have said that they have spoken to people who have been moved from social housing just a few months ago who have said that the accommodation just needs some renewal—small repairs—and that it is okay to live in it. We have discussed that with the Scottish Government, but have been told that that social housing is not suitable for living in any more.

Social housing or accommodation is very important for mums with kids, because they will feel more comfortable in it. People who are staying here alone are tired of hotels, and they just want to have their own accommodation or property, or to live in a house or flat with sponsors. However, they are happy because they are in a safe place, and they have meals and support.

To answer your question, I cannot tell you where the block is, unfortunately. I am not in charge of that. Even the people whom I talk to every day do not understand where the block is. They have applied, and a lot of families in Scotland have applied to be host families. Where is the block? We do not understand.

09:15

There are host families in the Highlands, for example, but Ukrainians might have said in their application that they want to stay in Glasgow or Edinburgh, where there are not so many host families. That is why there is a block and why it is difficult to match people. When people from Kyiv or Kharkiv come here and move to the countryside in the Highlands, they are really happy, because there are amazing views and fresh air—it is brilliant. However, after two weeks, they start to get a bit nervous and a bit crazy, because they are used to living in big cities such as Kyiv, which has a population of 4 million. In the Highlands, the Ukrainians become very calm, get fresh air and are happy, but they want to move to big cities to live their lives, because that is what they are used to.

**Maurice Golden:** On a separate topic, what are your thoughts on the humanitarian effort in Ukraine and the Scottish Government's role in that?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** When the war started, if I am not mistaken, the Scottish Government provided, through the national health service,

medicine supplies worth £1.5 million, which was amazing.

We need to mention that all communities in Scotland are helping Ukraine by donating money and supplies, such as baby boxes. I visited a warehouse in Glasgow where baby boxes are being collected. "Scottish Government" was written on the baby boxes, so I asked whether the Scottish Government had provided them. The people said, "No—we are doing it on our own". They are collecting boxes throughout Scotland.

Empty boxes can be given, but a lot of mums in Scotland who have given birth to kids have presented full boxes to the warehouse, because they do not need them and they want to help mums in Ukraine. The warehouse is very big and had a lot of those boxes. If the boxes are empty, the contents are collected individually, and the boxes are then sent to Ukraine on lorries. In our communities in Edinburgh and Glasgow, people are collecting supplies and donations and sending them to Ukraine.

There is enormous support from the Polish community in Scotland. Those guys are just crazy—in a good way. They bought an ambulance for us, and they found some guy in Poland to come here to pick it up and drive it to Ukraine. I was shocked when I heard that story.

The Scottish Government has also provided a lot of supplies and donations. Connecting Scotland has provided laptops and iPads for Ukrainians who are here, especially kids who need to continue their studies. Ukrainians were shocked and so happy to receive them, because their kids were still studying online. We hope that that will continue. They are very happy to receive the support; it is very useful for them, because they can continue their studies and some people can continue their job online thanks to the laptops, iPads and phones and so on. I cannot say that the Scottish Government is not supporting us. It is doing its best. It is giving all that it can for us.

For example, when it was the Scotland v Ukraine football match—sorry for that; it was just a football match and, unfortunately, we lost to Wales after that—the Scottish Government provided a bus for temporarily displaced Ukrainians who wanted to go to the match. The consulate of Ukraine arranged that in co-operation with the Scottish Government, which paid for it. I also thank Lothian Buses, who provided the bus. The Scottish Government paid for it and temporarily displaced Ukrainians who are staying in Edinburgh had the chance to go to Glasgow to the match.

The Scottish Government is helping us so much. It is providing supplies and donations. If we are talking about sending to Ukraine, it would perhaps also be useful to provide some medicine

supplies, which are very important to us. We also need food, especially long-term canned food such as macaroni, greens and so on. Those are the things that we need in Ukraine nowadays; those supplies are very useful for us.

**Maurice Golden:** Thank you. That was interesting.

**The Convener:** Thank you. We will now go to Mr Cameron. We might not be able to see him online, but I think that we will be able to hear him. Are you there, Donald?

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am, convener, and I hope that you can hear me.

Good morning, consul general. I apologise for not being there in person. It is very good to see you. Thank you for coming to the committee.

My question is about reports from a few weeks ago about certain refugees being moved from one location to another—I think that it was from Livingston to Aberdeen. They had settled in Livingston, and they were then asked to move. Do you have any observations to make on that? Was that a one-off? Have you had any other reports about that? Were there language issues that were not overcome? Are you aware of what the problem was?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** I did not hear about that case. I want to visit Aberdeen, but I do not know when I will have the free time to visit it and the Ukrainians who are there.

I will try to clarify the details of that story because I did not hear about it. I do not know why they were moved from Livingston to Aberdeen. We need to clarify how long they were in Livingston and why they were moved to Aberdeen. Maybe the problem was with the local authorities, or maybe people applied to move to another place because they do not like Livingston. It is difficult to answer that question. I will clarify what happened, Mr Cameron, and get back to you on that case.

On the language, as I have already said, English classes are needed, but there are a lot of Ukrainian interpreters in Scotland who help us with different cases in the consulate and community centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh. However, it would be very useful to have interpreters in the welcome hubs in the airports and on high streets because, when people just arrive in Edinburgh and do not speak English, they will be really happy if there are some people who speak Ukrainian. Not everybody knows that Ukrainian people work in the Ukrainian consulate here—people just think that we are Scottish and that we do not speak Ukrainian. When they call us and we answer in Ukrainian, they are shocked and say, “Oh, it’s so nice to hear my native language.” It would be very

useful to have interpreters in the welcome hubs or in other places.

There are brochures in Ukrainian on the national health service website, so you can find all the necessary information in Ukrainian—that is absolutely not a problem. I am really appreciative of NHS Scotland for doing that. Just yesterday, I checked and found that you can receive all information in the Ukrainian language, so that is absolutely not a problem. You can find all the information that is necessary to register with a general practitioner.

**Donald Cameron:** I am pleased to hear that, because language difficulties was one of the issues that we were worried about a few months ago. It is good to know that those are, basically, being overcome.

You have highlighted many other issues that refugees face when they arrive. Are you satisfied that there is enough co-ordination between the various bodies that are involved, such as the Scottish Government, local authorities, the NHS and the various third sector refugee groups?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** Co-ordination between the SG and the consulate and between the SG and the welcome hubs is amazing. We have regular meetings, and the SG provides me with all the updates and information. I really appreciate the work that Mr Gray and the departments in the Scottish Government are doing to help and support us—they are doing their best.

However, it would be useful to have more co-ordination between local authorities. For example, when people come here, they can receive some benefits and some money at the welcome hub, but then they do not know where they can receive other parts of the money—they need to look for it. They need to go to the city council or local council or to a welcome hub somewhere else. They just run about, because they do not know where they can receive the benefits. There are maybe some cases that we can discuss in which some more support can be received.

**Donald Cameron:** Where is the gap in receiving benefits? Is it between local authorities and the various agencies? What is the precise issue? If you do not know, that is fine—I do not want to press you for an answer.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** I think that there is a gap just because people do not have information. They need information about receiving money in one place, supplies in another and other benefits somewhere else. People could just be shown that, or it could be put on the internet or in brochures. People should be told that they need to apply or contact someone on a certain email address or telephone number to get all the necessary

information on where they can receive their benefits or supplies.

It is just about providing that information on a website. That could be on the Edinburgh airport website, for example. If someone is arriving and googles “welcome hub”, they will see the link for the Edinburgh airport website, which has necessary information in English and Ukrainian. There are some contact details and links to websites, but there are no contact details for local authorities or welcome hubs where people can receive their benefits. It would be useful to add those to such websites.

**Donald Cameron:** Thank you. We can take that up with the Scottish Government.

09:30

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Thank you for coming to the meeting and sharing all your thoughts with us. I am sure that that must still be incredibly difficult for you.

As the convener said in her introduction, we stand in solidarity with your country. For example, last week, I was in Dunoon, which is in my constituency, and the high school there had big Ukrainian flags surrounding its games hall. There is that strength of feeling for your country.

We have talked a lot about Ukrainians who are coming to Scotland. I am also interested in what you can tell us about what is happening within Ukraine. As my colleague Dr Allan said, we need to keep that in the public psyche—in public awareness. Will you share your thoughts about what is going on in your home country?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** All of you know what is happening in Ukraine, thanks to the media—especially the United Kingdom media. Those are brave people to be in Ukraine nowadays. By showing the world the Russian troops’ military crimes and what is going on in Ukraine, they are risking their lives. They are in a country in which there is a war.

There is a very difficult situation in the eastern part of Ukraine, where there are fights every day, especially for the city of Severodonetsk. At the same time, people in cities such as Kyiv, Odessa, Mykolaiv and Dnipro are trying to lead and renew their lives.

More and more Ukrainians are going back to Ukraine every day. They are happy to be in safe places in Europe, but Ukraine is our home, and all of us want to go back home, because we need to rebuild our country and renew our nation. Ukrainians are happy to be here but, at the same time, they just want to go back home. They are not scared because of the war and the missiles and bombs that are still flying; they are just going there

anyway. Unfortunately, there is still a blockade of our Odessa and Mykolaiv sea ports, so we cannot transport our grain. Our Government is trying to resolve that, because that is very important.

Russian troops continue to bomb and launch missiles on our peaceful cities, and they continue to kill our peaceful population. Unfortunately, up to 300 kids have already died in Ukraine during these three months. It is very difficult when we recognise that 300 kids are dead.

We are trying to defend ourselves and our country. We are thankful for the support of the whole world and the support of the volunteers who joined our international legion. In some parts of our country, our troops have started counter-attacks and pushed the Russians back. We are trying to do that in order to regain our territories and win the war. I hope that we will do that as soon as possible.

**Jenni Minto:** I think that we all hope so, too, and we are standing behind you very strongly.

**Mark Ruskell:** Thank you for sharing those thoughts.

I want to reflect on something that you said about transport. You said that there are some people who are living in the Highlands who feel a bit isolated and that there are people who need to travel to get advice and support. You also spoke about families who need to access schools that are not close by. You will be aware that, in Scotland, we have concessionary bus travel for over-60s and under-22s. Have Ukrainian people who are living here been able to access those schemes? What do you think about the idea of extending concessionary travel—free travel—on buses to all people who have been displaced and are living here temporarily?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** They know about the schemes and are applying to them, but most of the people concerned are between the ages of 22 and 60. They apply for bus tickets in our community centre. I do not remember where they take the bus tickets, but every time people visit our Ukrainian community centre, they can receive bus tickets. They can also receive them in the welcome hub on High Street. Maybe it will be possible to provide free rides for people between the ages of 22 and 60 if they show a Ukrainian passport, or maybe they could apply for a bus pass or travel pass for one month, as has been possible in Poland, Germany and Austria. That is something that people really need, because transport is not cheap.

Even people who live near the west end or in other parts of Edinburgh who want to visit the community centre on Tuesday and Thursday need to pay to take the bus. For example, to travel from Portobello to Royal Terrace and back again is not

cheap for them. Unfortunately, nowadays, they must count every coin, because every coin is important to them.

**The Convener:** That is interesting. In my area, we have a community transport bus. There are a couple of organisations that offer free transport for people. I can ask them about that. Other members may know about similar schemes, which could be used to support the Ukrainian community here.

**Alasdair Allan:** I have a supplementary to Jenni Minto's question about the situation in Ukraine; I realise that we are jumping from subject to subject. Given that war crimes are being committed in your country, are you able to say anything about what is happening with regard to the ability of prosecutors in Ukraine or international prosecutors to gather evidence on war crimes?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** Unfortunately, I do not have a lot of information about that. It would be better to ask the prosecutors in Ukraine.

There have already been some court trials of Russian troops who killed peaceful people. They were recognised as guilty, and they are now in Ukraine. That has happened with some of the cases.

Leaving aside my answers to your questions, there is something that I would like to say. I would like to tell you how much Ukrainians—myself included—appreciate the Scottish Government's programme that allows Ukrainians to study for free at universities and colleges. That is very important, and people are happy to hear about it. We are trying to clarify what the process and terms are for applying to study at universities and colleges. We need to get in touch with universities and colleges about the terms of entry. However, people are very happy to have that programme available, and a lot of Ukrainian students will try to apply for that. They want to match their studies in Ukraine, and they will see how they can do that in Scotland or make some changes. We appreciate that programme, because it is very important for us.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a brief supplementary to Alasdair Allan's question about war crimes. I understand that people who are fleeing the war will not have been interviewed before they arrive in Scotland. I presume that doing that once they get here could have a role in enabling them to record their experiences. They can be interviewed so that they can give evidence while their memory of what happened is still sharp. That would mean that there can be accountability in future for what is happening in Ukraine.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** We are in co-operation with Police Scotland so that Ukrainians who have come to Scotland and were victims of a war crime or saw a war crime being committed can get in

touch with Police Scotland and provide it with all the information and details of what happened, and Police Scotland will do its best to help them. As far as I know, all that they need to do is write an email or get in touch on the hotline and, after that, Police Scotland will get in touch and clarify all the details.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is very useful. I just wanted to get that on the record. Having met people who support Ukrainians, I was aware that there were active discussions on doing that to ensure that those experiences are not lost and that there is accountability in future. Thank you for clarifying that.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** We discussed that last week during a meeting with representatives of Police Scotland in our community centre in Edinburgh. They provided us with all the information, and we have shared it in groups, on our Facebook pages and on our website, so that people who are in Scotland know where to go to provide information about war crimes.

**The Convener:** I have a final question to ask, if you do not mind, Mr Mankovskyi. Thank you for mentioning the extension of support for students in colleges. I mentioned to you that it was wonderful to see an STV report a couple of weeks ago from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland that showed the talent of two pianists who took up the Scottish Government's offer.

Earlier, we heard about a problem for students who were here already and were about to finish their studies, which meant that their visas would come to an end at the end of the academic year this summer. Have those temporarily displaced Ukrainians been able to achieve an extension of their visas to allow them to remain in Scotland if they want to?

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** As far as I know, yes. Those who were already studying in Scotland can apply to an extension scheme. That is not a problem for them. They can do that, continue their studies here, and stay in Scotland. There are no issues or problems with that.

I need to mention that there was a big thing for all of us a few days ago. The University of Edinburgh signed a memorandum with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. That is very important for us because Kyiv and Edinburgh have been twinned cities since 1998. That memorandum is the start of something new, and we hope that it will be the beginning of something bigger in the relations between the two cities.

**The Convener:** That is a positive note to end on.

Thank you very much for sharing your observations and experiences with us. That is really helpful. The baby box that goes out in

Scotland has a poem in it called “Welcome Wee One” by Jackie Kay. We would wish the wish in that poem for all the children of Ukraine at this time.

**Yevhen Mankovskyi:** I was really touched when I visited the warehouse in Glasgow. I just cried really, because every time I think about kids, my heart breaks. That was especially the case when I saw the baby boxes. It was amazing, because mums in Ukraine can receive the same supplies that they received in a peaceful time. They are very useful, and they are great things.

**The Convener:** I will suspend the meeting to allow our witnesses to swap. Consul general, you are welcome to stay for the next part of the meeting, when the minister will join us.

09:46

*Meeting suspended.*

09:49

*On resuming—*

**The Convener:** I welcome our second panel. From the Scottish Government, we have Neil Gray, the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with Special Responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine—we might need to change that to “Minister with Special Responsibility for Temporarily Displaced Ukrainians”, following the consul general’s contribution; Will Tyler-Greig, interim deputy director, Ukraine resettlement; and Joanna Keating, head of international development.

Minister, I know that you recently visited Poland. We would be interested in hearing about that. I invite you to make an opening statement.

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray):** I thank the committee for having me along again this morning. As the convener mentioned, last week, I visited Poland to see first hand how it has responded to the arrival of more than 3 million displaced people from Ukraine, and to show our solidarity with the Polish people who are supporting them. When I was there, I met international aid organisations and the Polish Government, and was able to see how the £4 million of financial aid that we are providing has made a difference.

I also met inspirational leaders from civil society, who are supporting people from the moment that they arrive in Poland. I met volunteers at UNICEF’s blue dot centre. Blue dot centres are safe places at key transit points that provide

families and children with critical information and services. UNICEF has used some of the £1 million from the Scottish Government to fund 24 blue dot centres in countries neighbouring Ukraine where there are a high number of displaced people.

One part of my visit will stay with me for a long time. At the start of the war, an unoccupied, disused shopping centre in Krakow was repurposed to welcome people who had fled Ukraine. It provides temporary accommodation and food, alongside support, mainly for women and children. Donations of clothing and footwear are put on display—like they would be in a department store—giving people dignity when choosing the clothes that they need. It was incredibly hard for me to see how women and children in particular are living in that refugee centre. The people around them are absolutely doing their best to make it the best place possible for them. However, seeing, feeling and smelling first hand the difficult situation that the Ukrainian people are facing has given me even greater determination to ensure that we in Scotland are doing everything that we can to provide the support that people arriving here need and deserve.

It is clear to me that Scottish support for agencies on the ground in the region is still very much needed, but I am also determined to do everything that we possibly can to support Ukrainians while Scotland is their home. One of the major lessons from my visit is that there is a need for local and national Government in Scotland to fully utilise the power of the third sector and engage volunteer networks to support displaced people to settle in our communities. I am immensely proud that we in Scotland have opened our homes to people fleeing this awful war, but it is clear that our work is far from done.

You have already heard from my friend the consul general about the work that is on-going and the challenges that we have ahead. When we met in March, Scotland was preparing to welcome displaced people. We were determinedly pressing the UK Government to waive visa requirements. At that time, very few people had arrived in Scotland. We have moved on considerably since then. Since I last gave evidence to the committee, more than 4,000 people with a Scottish sponsor have arrived. The Scottish Government has sponsored around 70 per cent of those arrivals.

We have provided a safe and quick route for people to find safety in Scotland. Our local authorities have been working hard, supported by third sector partners, to do all that we can to work within the UK Government visa scheme to welcome and support people arriving from Ukraine.

A national matching service, delivered by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, has been set up to match people arriving under the supersponsor scheme to longer-term accommodation and make use of the generous offer of the use of their homes that has been made by the people of Scotland.

My concerns about the UK Government's bureaucratic approach to the humanitarian crisis are well documented. We continue to press it to waive visas, put people before process and provide local authorities with the funding that they need to support people to rebuild their lives.

Last week, the Welsh Government announced that it was pausing its supersponsor scheme. I am very sympathetic to its situation, and I know that that will have been a very hard decision to reach. However, that underlines the challenges that we are all facing in this situation.

The First Minister has made it clear that her intention is for Scotland to welcome a fair and proportionate number of displaced people from Ukraine who arrive in the UK. We are not planning to pause the Scottish supersponsor scheme. Our energy and focus are on building up the national matching service and providing people with longer-term accommodation and integration support to make Scotland their home for as long as they need it to be.

I am happy to take questions.

**The Convener:** Thank you very much, minister. It is interesting to hear that you are still of the opinion that visas should be waived for those looking to enter the UK. Regardless of the UK's status in relation to the European Union, we are still part of the democratic world. When the deputy convener and I attended the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly earlier in the year, there was a session on Ukraine. We were observers and unable to take part. I particularly remember a Polish MEP talking about the pressures on Poland and the sense of frustration with the UK because it could be doing so much more to play its part. Those pressures are also faced by neighbouring countries—Moldova and Hungary, for example, as well as Germany—that are experiencing large displacements of people. What representations do you continue to make to the UK Government to change its position on that issue?

**Neil Gray:** On visas, an example that best illustrates the position is to compare the arrival numbers of just over 4,500 in Scotland with those in the Republic of Ireland. The countries are of a similar size and in a similar geographical location. One has a visa requirement; the other does not. Ireland has more than 10 times the number of arrivals of displaced Ukrainians. That helps to illustrate the barrier that visa requirements are

putting in the way of people coming to Scotland and, for that matter, to the rest of the UK.

You are absolutely right to underline the challenges that Ukraine's neighbouring countries are facing. A couple of weeks ago, for a different reason, I was in Germany, where I was able to visit community groups in Offenburg, in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, that are supporting displaced Ukrainians in the area. Baden-Württemberg alone has welcomed more than 100,000 displaced Ukrainians. There are real challenges with those numbers, understandably.

Similarly, when I was in Poland last week, it was clear that the third sector input there is massive. There is also support in place from local and national Government. However, there are clear challenges in the neighbouring countries.

Given what I saw in the disused shopping centre that supports displaced Ukrainians, where women, children and their pets are living cheek by jowl on camp beds in unbearable heat, it is incumbent on us all to do everything that we can to support as many people as possible—Ukrainians and others in similar situations who are fleeing conflict—to come to Scotland.

**Jenni Minto:** Thank you, minister, and your team for coming along today. In your introduction, you talked about your recent visit to Poland. Are there any other experiences from your visit that you can share with us? You have highlighted the importance of the third sector. What did you learn from the third sector in Poland and Germany that the third sector in Scotland could perhaps also learn from when welcoming Ukrainians here?

**Neil Gray:** It is important that I stress the incredible on-going effort from third sector partners and local authorities in Scotland. The work that they are doing is phenomenal and self-starting. You have heard from Yevhen Mankovskiy about some of the direct support that is going to Ukraine and the impact that that is having.

The third sector in Poland is far more involved at the initial welcoming stage and is doing a lot more on the ground, whereas in Scotland matters are being co-ordinated by local government with support from the third sector. I am very grateful to the Scottish Refugee Council and others for all the work that they are doing in that regard.

On what more our third sector partners might be able to do, we need to ensure that the full team Scotland approach can be deployed. We are all facing a huge challenge. We all want to overcome that and ensure that our approach works incredibly well for those who are arriving from Ukraine.

The other lesson that I have taken from the visit to Poland is that our Scottish Government support is leading to tangible results—that was clear to

me. I visited the blue dot centre; Caritas, which we work with; the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which we have funded; and the Red Cross centres. I saw the work that they are doing to support people as they arrive in Poland, and I know what they are doing on the ground in Ukraine as well.

From that, it was clear to me that our support is being well used and that, sadly, there is a job to do, both for large non-governmental organisations that we have supported and for smaller NGOs. Some of the smaller NGOs, such as Open Krakow, which is led by Maria Wojtacha, are incredible. I take my hat off to them for the support that they are providing alongside accommodation and for the way in which they are giving dignity to people in a really challenging situation. I was able to articulate that and pass on my thanks to them for the work that they are doing.

It was a useful trip for me in terms of taking back lessons that we are already trying to deploy in the response in Scotland.

10:00

**Jenni Minto:** I said to the consul general that, last week, I was in Dunoon grammar school, which had Ukrainian flags. As I drive from Edinburgh to Argyll and Bute, I see that there is much support across various communities for Ukraine. I am interested to hear more about what we can do, from a soft power perspective, to support Ukraine.

**Neil Gray:** We have been doing a huge amount already, but there is clearly more that can be done. I was at the solidarity rally a week past Sunday, which started at the Russian consulate and ended up outside the Scottish Parliament. The support on the streets was incredible. Like you, as I go back and forth in my constituency of Airdrie and Shotts and around Scotland, I see Ukrainian flags and colours everywhere, as Mr Mankovskyi mentioned. I am wearing the Ukrainian tartan, as is the convener.

We are doing everything that we can in ways that feel small. However, as Mr Mankovskyi articulated, every small gesture—when we use the hashtag #standwithUkraine or the phrase “Slava Ukraini!”—matters to the people I spoke to in and around Poland and to those I speak to in Scotland. The situation is incredibly challenging, as we have heard. People are worried about their family members, their property and the future of their nation, so everything that we can possibly do to support them and show solidarity is worth doing.

**Sarah Boyack:** I am in strong agreement with that stand with Ukraine sentiment. I can tell that your having been across to Poland and seen the reality on the ground has had a personal impact on you.

My questions are about how you are monitoring the supersponsor scheme. What does success look like for you? The feedback that I have had and the submissions that we have had from representatives of different organisations, such as JustRight Scotland, COSLA and Glasgow health and social care partnership, indicate that there is a real gap between our collective ambitions and the capacity of local authorities to deliver.

What monitoring are you doing on the impact of people being stuck in hotels for weeks before they are linked up with a sponsor? We got feedback from the consul general that there is a particular issue for women with children, for whom being stuck in a hotel is totally wrong. I have also picked up the particular issue that, when people get stuck in a hotel, the roots that they put down are with the Ukrainian support community, which makes it even harder once they are given an allocation if it is not in the same area because they have already put down roots and have support.

What are you doing to speed up the matching process? I would like a comment from you about people being stuck in hotels. The experience of the Afghan and Syrian communities is that people are still stuck in temporary accommodation, which causes huge issues for access to schools, health services, post-traumatic stress disorder support and, particularly, NHS dentistry. Hosts have got in touch with me who are really worried about the Ukrainians they are trying to support. They are asking who they should contact because it is hard to get those links on the ground.

**Neil Gray:** I understand all those concerns. We do not want people in hotel rooms any longer than necessary. We are working with local authorities to build the capacity of the matching service and have committed resource to that. We are in constant dialogue with our local authority partners to ensure that there is as much clarity as possible around how that process works, that we get feedback and that we can ensure that there is flexibility around local matching. Where possible, that will allow the local authority teams to use their local knowledge to take matches forward more quickly. I am looking for us to do anything and everything to ensure that things get moving as quickly as possible.

There is no judgment from me over what Wales has done over the past couple of weeks, because I understand the pressures that they will have been under, but it shows the challenge that we face. The challenge is a result of the scheme being an immigration one rather than a formal resettlement one—the two approaches have different levels of support. However, we will certainly do everything that we can to ensure that we are responding appropriately.

You are absolutely right that, even in hotel accommodation, people start to put down roots and make community connections and their children start to make friend networks. That is great, but that makes it challenging if there is a need to move people on to other areas. We want to be as sympathetic as we can be to that issue, but it shows why it is important that we get the matching service operational as quickly as possible, so that we are able to provide people with a settled community that allows them to put down those roots as quickly as possible. I am alive to all those issues. We are constantly monitoring the situation. We are in constant dialogue with our colleagues in local government and the local authority teams, and will continue to provide the support that they feel is necessary to ensure that we get people into longer-term secure accommodation as quickly as possible.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is useful as far as it goes, but it is the detail of those issues that is important. For example, Highland Council tells us that the lack of guidance from the Scottish Government is creating a major problem for it now in relation to the supersponsor scheme and contingency planning, and COSLA has sent us a big list of problems that it has with the matching service at the moment. I hope that you can be given a copy of those papers, and it might be helpful if we could have a briefing back from you on those issues. I could not possibly ask you today about all the issues that have been raised, because there are so many of them.

**Neil Gray:** I would be interested to see what further guidance Highland Council is looking for, because, with respect, we have provided significant guidance on how we expect the system to work and are looking to ensure that we are working in partnership with local government. If there are concerns that it wishes to raise, we want to hear them and work through them as quickly as possible.

Similarly, I am in constant dialogue with COSLA. I had a meeting with COSLA's president on Monday and, two weeks previously, I had a meeting with COSLA to try to find a way to ensure that we get the matching service working as quickly as possible. If the committee wants to write to me with any specific questions, I would be more than happy to write back timeously to ensure that you are given confidence that we are taking all these issues incredibly seriously and that we are working through all the concerns and questions that have been raised with us.

The first point that you acknowledged was around the impact that visiting Poland has had on me and the determination that I have that we do everything that we can and commit as much resource as we can—from the Scottish

Government, local government and the third sector—to ensure that we are giving people arriving from Ukraine and other war zones the opportunity to make Scotland their safe and supportive home for as long as they need it.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is a useful commitment. To be specific, Highland Council said:

“The lack of funding instructions from SG prevents the Council from planning ahead for this resettlement scheme.”

My second question is about that need to plan ahead. When I visited the Ukrainian community last week, I heard of someone who has been given their two months' notice for leaving their sponsor, because it is a six-month scheme. We are not just at the point of matching people with their supersponsor—in the next few weeks, people will start to come to the end of that six-month period. What is being done to think ahead?

Before I ask my next question, I declare an interest in terms of my former employment and as a Lothian MSP, on account of the lack of affordable social housing in Edinburgh, which is already a huge issue. What work will be done not only in the medium term but in the short term to address that issue of accessible housing? The consul general talked about temporary accommodation and the fact that people fleeing from Ukraine would tolerate slightly lower standards of housing, but we have our own health and safety standards. What will be done to get those people access to social housing and to get longer-term placements for people so that, in particular, women with children can get their kids stable and settled and can access employment and things such as post-traumatic stress disorder support?

Regardless of how enthusiastic people might be to get back to Ukraine, we know that, for many of them, not only have their homes been bombed but their whole community has been eradicated. Where are we going to put people up and what can we do now in terms of access to affordable housing so that they can make their home in Scotland, even if it is only for one or two years? The hosting process does not tick that box, so what is next? What are you doing?

**Neil Gray:** There are a number of issues in your question, which I will try to respond to in turn.

I am not surprised that Highland Council is expressing concern about the funding situation, because we share those concerns. I have stated publicly a number of times—in the chamber, in this committee and in every meeting that I have had with the UK Government—my concerns about the lack of parity that there is between those who arrive on the family scheme and those who arrive on the supersponsor scheme or the homes for Ukraine scheme. A £10,500 tariff is supposed to

go to local authorities for people who arrive on the homes for Ukraine scheme—there is still an issue around the arrival of that money, and I am happy to address that, too—but local authorities that host those who arrive on the family scheme do not get that support.

We all know that, regardless of how someone arrives from Ukraine, the resource commitment that will be required from local government will be the same. I can reassure Highland Council and all local authorities that the Scottish Government is doing absolutely everything that it can in its conversations with the UK Government to get certainty about funding and parity of funding.

The second point about funding is that, at the moment, we have certainty only about funding for this first year. We have not been given a commitment from the UK Government about what will happen in the second and third years of the three-year visa.

On the point that you made about housing and the fact that people are feeling vulnerable about the fact that the initial six-month period is coming to an end, I can understand that feeling. The communication from the UK Government was that the arrangements would be for at least six months, if people could commit to that, but I am not going to state that I expect those who are hosting to go beyond what they feel would be appropriate.

We are already planning and have been doing a lot of work to make social housing available. We have provided local government with £11 million in order to repurpose properties and bring void properties back into use. As you would expect, given your previous employment, we are in conversation with registered social landlords, and they have been doing a good job of helping us to ensure that social housing options are available. We are working in a number of areas to ensure that we can give people the safety and security that they need and deserve. That work involves the social space but, of course, as people find employment, there will be opportunities for people to transition to their own arrangements, particularly if they are looking to stay here for longer.

I can understand the concern that you have expressed about the situation in Edinburgh. That is why we are keen to ensure that we have a full-Scotland approach that includes all 32 local authorities, as was the case with the Syria scheme. That is to ensure that, given the natural inclination of people to wish to be near or around Edinburgh, it is articulated that there are opportunities beyond Edinburgh. We have colleagues here from the Western Isles, Argyll and Bute, Mid Scotland and Fife, North East Scotland and Central Scotland, who would all articulate the various merits of their areas and the opportunities that are available in those areas to find

employment, put down roots and find homes. I hope that we all continue to articulate the opportunities that are available across Scotland to ensure that the particular pressures in Edinburgh that Ms Boyack has articulated can be avoided in the long term.

10:15

**Sarah Boyack:** I reiterate that it would be much appreciated if we could get answers to some of those questions, because they are now issues, not future issues.

Highland Council is looking for clarity on funding of the supersponsorship scheme. There is a list of issues in the submission from COSLA, and it would be really good to get a set of answers on those. For example, it talks about the fact that host councils do not have the capacity to arrange transport for matches to be put with their hosts, and there is not a model elsewhere in the UK for doing so. Where we are volunteering and we need to come up with new schemes, that all needs to be done urgently, because it is not happening at the moment.

**Neil Gray:** I would challenge that. There are areas where that is happening. We have examples of local authorities putting in place travel schemes to ensure that people are able to move around. We have already talked about the travel provision that is available, and the committee heard about some of that from Mr Mankovskiy.

However, if COSLA has raised issues, I imagine that those are issues that we discuss regularly in our meetings. If the committee wanted to write to me with any specific issues that it would like more information on, which we have not been able to provide clarity on, because the list is too long to read out today, I would be more than happy to respond in detail in a timely fashion. I give that commitment to the convener and to Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** Thank you.

**Maurice Golden:** Minister, we heard earlier that approximately 500 Ukrainians have been staying in a hotel for one month or more. Is that a number that you recognise? If so, how long will it be before that situation is addressed?

**Neil Gray:** If I were to put an estimation on that, I do not think that it would be far away from what the committee has already discussed. It is not a situation that we want to see happening. We do not want people to be in hotel rooms for any longer than is absolutely necessary, for all the reasons that Mr Mankovskiy articulated, including the pressures on families, and mothers with young children in particular. I perfectly understand that and absolutely sympathise. I cannot imagine the challenge of living out of a hotel room.

The committee can be reassured that the Scottish Government, working with local government and our third sector partners, is doing everything that it can. Following my visit to Poland, having seen how people are living there, I have placed an even greater emphasis on ensuring that we are doing everything that we can. We are leaving no stone unturned in exploring how we can commit the resource, both human and financial, to ensure that we get the matching service moving as quickly as possible.

A reasonable number of matches has already been made; the matching service works. We just need to make sure that it happens as quickly as possible. There are different reasons why there is a challenge there. Some people who offered their properties have had a change in circumstances, and those conversations have to happen. It is a resource-intensive process to go through those discussions to ensure that we understand people's circumstances.

I would be happy to speak to anybody who feels that they have additional ideas about ways of ensuring that we are able to address the situation and get the process moving as quickly as possible.

**Maurice Golden:** We heard from COSLA that it has not received all the funding that it was promised, and Highland Council also submitted evidence to that effect. Can you confirm that that position has been rectified?

**Neil Gray:** I am happy to be corrected, but I do not think that any money has ever been held back by the Scottish Government. The £11 million is there for local government to utilise to ensure that housing provision is made available in a flexible way. Local authorities can use that as they wish to ensure that they can provide accommodation to people who are being hosted in their communities. I am not aware of any money ever having been held back by the Scottish Government.

There is a question mark over when the money from the UK Government for the £10,500 tariff will arrive, and there is a serious question mark over whether £10,500 is enough for local authorities to be able to provide the services that are required to ensure that the wraparound support that is needed is provided. We are looking at what we can do to ensure that local government is properly supported in that regard. There is also a question mark around the UK Government not having given any further commitment to that funding beyond this year, so I would be grateful for anything that Mr Golden can do to articulate and amplify the concerns that he has received.

**Maurice Golden:** Just to clarify, in relation to the Scottish supersponsorship scheme, Highland Council has said:

“The lack of funding instructions from SG prevents the Council from planning ahead for this resettlement scheme.”

Is that incorrect?

**Neil Gray:** I am happy to discuss any concerns that Highland Council or any other local authority has about the challenges that it faces in the longer term. We work with local government organisations such as the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers and COSLA to ensure that there is long-term planning in place. I am grateful to local government for the work that it is doing, and if there is anything more that the Scottish Government can do to ensure that local government is able to support the system that we have in place, I would be more than happy to hear about that. We will work with local government to ensure that we are providing the warm Scottish welcome that we and our constituents expect but, more importantly, that is expected and deserved by the people who are arriving from Ukraine.

**Maurice Golden:** To date, none of the Scottish Government's humanitarian emergency fund has been used to support the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. Are there any plans in place to deploy that fund?

**Neil Gray:** I am happy to bring in Joanna Keating at this point to provide clarification on the process for the activation of the HEF. As far as I am aware, such a request has not been made.

**Joanna Keating (Scottish Government):** The £1 million humanitarian emergency fund, which is an annual amount, was spent on things other than Ukraine last year, but an additional £4 million was made available specifically for Ukraine. Going into this financial year, the new £1 million is available.

We have a humanitarian panel that is made up of international non-governmental organisations, such as Oxfam, SCIAF, Tearfund, the British Red Cross and so on. The panel comes to the Scottish Government to activate the fund—we call it activating for a crisis. The panel looks globally to decide whether there is a particular crisis that meets its criteria and where its members are already active. Many members of the HEF panel have already received funding for Ukraine, including the British Red Cross and SCIAF, and we gave money to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. We have appointed a panel that takes decisions on activation, so other than when a DEC appeal is launched—one was launched for Ukraine earlier this year—that is the system.

If the panel decided that it wanted to activate the fund for Ukraine, that would be considered but, equally, it will activate the fund for many other crises around the world, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo or the humanitarian crisis in the

Horn of Africa. There has been an impact on Africa from the crisis in Ukraine in relation to food prices, famine and the United Nations World Food Programme.

**Alasdair Allan:** Minister, will you say a bit more about the UK's approach to visas? You mentioned that that approach is very different from the approach in Ireland. As far as we can understand, it is pretty different from the approach everywhere in Europe. How unusual is the UK approach and what conversations are you having with the UK Government about it?

**Neil Gray:** Dr Allan is correct that the UK is the only European nation that is requiring visas for those fleeing the war in Ukraine. We have to ask why that is the case, when every other European nation has opened its doors, has allowed people to enter and has put people before process.

I referenced Ireland because of its geographical location. Mr Mankovskyi articulated very well the fact that people want to stay close to Ukraine, which is understandable, because they have family reasons and property that they want to check. However, some people are perhaps looking for different opportunities, and are willing to travel further afield. We can see the difference in arrival numbers between Scotland and Ireland, and the major difference there is to do with the visa requirements. Ireland has welcomed 10 times the number of people that Scotland has. That should embarrass us all, because we all have a collective responsibility to do everything possible from a humanitarian point of view to support people who are displaced from Ukraine.

As I did when I was in Poland and Germany, I commend the efforts of the communities in other parts of Europe that are opening their doors, as I commend people in Scotland and the rest of the UK who are looking to do everything that they can to welcome people here.

**Alasdair Allan:** You mentioned the notional sum of £10,500 that the UK Government has allocated to some schemes but not to others. You expressed concern about equity between the different schemes, but do you have any concerns about the sum itself? What are local authorities expected to cover from it?

**Neil Gray:** Local authorities are expected to cover all areas of wraparound support that they have responsibility to deliver, including social work, education, housing and all manner of other areas of responsibility. I am concerned that the £10,500 is not sufficient, and I do not believe that it has parity with the numbers for support in previous resettlement schemes. I have repeatedly articulated to the UK Government those points about the overall quantum and about parity between different routes to the UK, and my

colleagues, right up to the First Minister, have done so as well.

There is sympathy for our position. Particularly on parity between the visa routes, I think that Michael Gove and Lord Harrington have expressed sympathy. However, at the moment, that sympathy has not extended to the Treasury extending support. My call today is that, if we are not talking about the overall quantum of £10,500, we should at the very least ensure that there is parity of support, regardless of how people arrive.

**Alasdair Allan:** Finally, on another subject, we have alluded a little to rural areas, many of which need new people and also new houses. The Government is putting money into social housing. I appreciate that displaced persons might not want to stay here in the long term, but should local authorities and other agencies be factoring in the needs of displaced persons in planning for housing in rural areas?

**Neil Gray:** Absolutely—that should go without saying. To be fair, from the conversations that I have had with local authorities, I think that they are looking to do everything that they can. Dr Allan is absolutely right. He represents a community that has suffered depopulation and has challenges in that regard, but it also has many opportunities. The area is a beautiful place to live and work and a good place to raise a family.

10:30

We must understand that people arriving from Ukraine will probably have as much understanding of Scotland as we do of Ukraine. We know about Kyiv, but we know only what we have seen on television. It is incumbent on us all to ensure that we articulate the opportunities that lie beyond Edinburgh and Glasgow. They are wonderful cities, but there are opportunities beyond the central belt.

Some of those who arrive will want to find employment very quickly, while others will be in a different situation. There is no pressure, but there are employment opportunities beyond the central belt for those who want to find work. Dr Allan has articulated that well in talking about the community that he represents, and I see Ms Minto nodding her head, given the community that she represents in Argyll and Bute. I hope we can ensure that people enjoy the whole of Scotland and that the pressures on Edinburgh and Glasgow can be released a little as a result of that.

**Mark Ruskell:** I recently met staff from the Ukrainian advice centre and the worker support centre. The Government finance for those centres is welcome and much needed. As I understand it, the Ukraine extension scheme, and any legal advice that is required about that scheme, have

been relatively straightforward. However, the Ukraine families scheme and the sponsorship scheme throw up far more complex needs for immigration advice and support, and for legal advice. At the moment, a lot of that advice is being provided pro bono.

What might any on-going support look like? What resources might be required to ensure that people get what they need? Legal aid is not available to many people.

**Neil Gray:** We are providing support through JustRight Scotland and constantly review the level of support that JustRight Scotland requires to ensure that we can meet the demand for advice about immigration status. I hope that the capacity that we have put in place at JustRight Scotland will ensure that we can meet that demand.

As Mr Ruskell says, the extension scheme is useful up to a point, because it gives people certainty until the end of this year. However, we do not have parity between those who are on the seasonal workers visa and those who arrive through the homes for Ukraine or family visa schemes, which allow people to be here for three years. We have asked for that to be rectified to give better parity so that people can have more certainty.

Another issue is that people who are on the seasonal workers scheme are unable to sponsor family members to come here. The supersponsor scheme has given a workaround for that: people can be sponsored by the Scottish Government and can join their families. That is a workaround, but it would be fairer to ensure parity across all the schemes. That again speaks to the challenges of taking an immigration response to a humanitarian crisis, as opposed to having a proper resettlement scheme.

**Mark Ruskell:** Mr Mankovskyi was clear that the vast majority of Ukrainians want to return home, but I also hear from the advice centres that some may have been displaced several times by war and may wish to remain here and look for longer-term employment in the UK. How are you factoring that in? There is some complexity about visas and UK Government policy. How are you supporting people who want to remain in the UK and in Scotland?

**Neil Gray:** I have full sympathy with that. When I was in Krakow, I met Alun Ruznik, who is originally from Bosnia and fled the war in Sarajevo when he was 13 and his family moved to Slovenia. He moved around the world for work, feeling very transient, and ended up working as a chef in Barcelona.

At the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, he felt a calling to do something to help. As he knew Slovenia, he thought that returning there would be

his way of doing that. Having got to Krakow, with a seven-hour stopover before his next train, he asked around and ended up at the world food kitchen outside the disused shopping centre that I mentioned. He is there now, alongside displaced Ukrainians, and is sleeping on a camp bed in the accommodation that has been provided and volunteering his services. He is an incredible man, and I found speaking to him really emotional. I pay tribute to the work that he and others from around the world are doing to help on the ground.

That feeling of transience—of someone not knowing where their home actually is, as a result of having fled one, two or however many conflict zones and having to find and rebuild their life—must be incredibly challenging. That is why I am so determined that we do everything that we can both to provide people with initial sanctuary and safety in Scotland and to give them the support that they need to enable them to rebuild their lives and ensure that they can call Scotland their home for as long as possible.

I will bring in Will Tyler-Greig to give more detail on the worker support centre to which we have provided funding. It is important to ensure that people have access to employment support, to give them the resource and the independence that they desire. From the conversations that I have had with Yevhen Mankovskyi over many months, it is clear that the desire for independence and their own sustainability is very strong among people arriving from Ukraine. Sometimes, it is not possible. I understand that people are arriving with horrendous trauma. In my constituency, I have seen children for whom that has had a profound impact. However, for people who are able to and who want to achieve that, we want to ensure that we are doing everything possible to provide such support.

I am keen to bring in Will to provide more detail on the worker support centre and integration support.

**Will Tyler-Greig (Scottish Government):** In addition to providing support through JustRight Scotland, which we heard about earlier, the Scottish Government has invested £41,000 in a worker support centre. It uses a model that operates elsewhere around the world to provide advice to seasonal workers. For people who have arrived through the supersponsor route, a variety of agencies provide support, including Skills Development Scotland. The DWP is also in two hotels, meeting individuals to talk about access to benefits. Those who need support straight away can access the Scottish welfare fund to bridge that gap. Unlike universal credit, that support is not repayable.

**Mark Ruskell:** My final question is about transport. Earlier, we heard from Mr Mankovskyi

about the challenges that people face, and the minister has spoken about the need for independence and dignity for those who are living here. Some people are living in quite isolated situations, particularly in rural areas, where they need to travel to access advice and support. They often need to travel to access school and other facilities as well. Although some will be eligible for national entitlement cards or free bus travel, there is a big gap in the middle.

Minister, you have spoken about how councils are trying to fill that gap by, for example, buying tickets and having those available at hubs. Would it not just be a lot simpler for us to extend the national entitlement card scheme to displaced people in Scotland? The current entitlement scheme extends to up to 2.6 million people. We are talking about around 4,500 Ukrainian people, which is a number that is akin to a rounding error in terms of the budget that is available for concessionary travel in Scotland. Clearly, extending the scheme would be transformational for people who are here and do not have access to cars or other transport advantages that we have. They are probably the most needy in terms of access to transport, for independence, dignity and everything else.

**Neil Gray:** I support in principle everything that Mark Ruskell has said. Following my previous appearance at the committee, when Paul Sweeney attended as a substitute member, I had a productive meeting with him and Bob Doris on that very issue, alongside Transport Scotland officials and others. We are trying to work our way through it and find a system that would avoid the need for complex legislation. There are complexities in extending the scheme, and in ensuring that we can identify who we would be extending it to and how that would work.

We are trying to find a way through that situation, and we have great sympathy for the proposal. I very much appreciate the work that has been done by local authorities across Scotland, which Mr Ruskell mentioned. As well as Stirling, many others across Scotland, including Glasgow and Edinburgh, are doing fantastic work to provide transport support.

I would not dismiss the entitlement that is already available. Not long after that committee meeting, I met Mr Mankovskyi and we discussed that very issue. I explained to him the entitlement that people already have because of their age, for example. At that stage, the entitlement that is already available had not been communicated to the Ukrainian community. That entitlement does not cover everybody; it covers just over half of the people, and we are looking at what we can do to ensure that the other half also have support.

**Mark Ruskell:** When might you be able to get that over the line? Some of the complexity around the national entitlement card has been about providing documentary evidence to the Improvement Service in order to get the card. I presume that displaced people are some of the most highly documented people in our society so, in technical terms, it should be relatively simple, although I understand that, to extend the franchise further, a committee might need to agree to an updated statutory instrument.

Can you give us a horizon for when the Government might come to a decision? We are now entering the summer, and people need that entitlement. As you said, the number of people is less than 4,500 and probably only 2,500, given that both ends of the age spectrum already have the entitlement. As Mr Mankovskyi said, it is the families in the middle—the mums with kids—who are really struggling at the moment. It is a small gap, so when can we fill it?

**Neil Gray:** That is a fair challenge, and I wish that I could give a definitive answer to it, but I cannot. Bob Doris and Paul Sweeney asked for the entitlement to be extended to asylum seekers and refugees in general, not just displaced Ukrainians. We are trying to ensure that, if possible, we provide something on a national basis, and that is where the additional complexity will lie. However, I give a commitment to write to the committee and to Mr Ruskell, given his interest in the area, to provide an update on how we are progressing with that.

**Donald Cameron:** Good morning, minister. I apologise for not being at the meeting in person.

I will follow up on a couple of questions that I asked the consul general. The first one was on the reports of various displaced persons being moved from Livingston to Aberdeen a couple of weeks ago. What is the Scottish Government's response to that? Was it a one-off? Is the minister aware of the reasons behind that? I would be grateful for any explanation that he can give.

**Neil Gray:** Yes, I am aware of the circumstances. That particular weekend, we had challenges with temporary accommodation and ensuring that we had availability for people who we knew were going to be arriving into Edinburgh, which is, predominantly, the arrival point for the whole of Scotland. We asked some of the displaced Ukrainians, who were in a hotel in Livingston, whether they would be willing to move elsewhere, and a bus was put on for that to happen. Some people still travelled. There was a regrettable incident, and that issue caused additional harm and stress to those who were potentially travelling.

It is important to stress that lessons have been learned from that about the need for all of us to ensure that we communicate as well as possible, not just with displaced Ukrainians but with those who support them. I have already articulated, as has the committee, the challenges in Edinburgh and the local area and the need to ensure that there is a whole of Scotland approach. Different parts of Scotland provide different opportunities, and we need to make sure that we articulate to people why we sometimes need to move them.

However, I think that the necessity for such moves is much reduced, given the situation that we are now in. I want to reduce that even further by ensuring that we progress the matching service as quickly as possible and allow people to get into longer-term accommodation.

10:45

**Donald Cameron:** Are you confident that such a situation will not happen again?

**Neil Gray:** I certainly hope so. There will always be a need for people to move in Scotland. As I have already articulated, Edinburgh is the arrival point for the vast majority of people who arrive from Ukraine. Whichever country they arrive from, they arrive predominantly, although not exclusively, in Edinburgh, and it is clearly not sustainable for people to stay in the Edinburgh area for a long period, because of the accommodation pressures that Ms Boyack has articulated. Therefore, there will always need to be a move or a couple of moves for people to put down their roots. I want to limit that as much as possible and ensure that there is communication so that, at all stages when there is a move, it is voluntary and people from Ukraine understand the process that they are going through.

**Donald Cameron:** I want to move on to information about benefits, which the consul general touched on. I do not know whether you were able to hear all that he said.

**Neil Gray:** I did.

**Donald Cameron:** That is helpful. He suggested that there is an issue relating to information about benefits. Can you elaborate on that? Is publishing or making available the right information a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions or the welcome hubs? Is there anything that you can illustrate or help us with on that issue?

**Neil Gray:** There are a number of areas on which it is important to provide clarity. First, I think that I will have a conversation about this with Mr Mankovskyi later, but some of the challenge is to do with people understanding how far away they are from the social security support for which they

qualify actually arriving with them. As Mr Cameron will be well aware, part of the issue is that a five-week wait is in-built for universal credit, and we all know the challenges that result from that. I do not think that we will resolve that particular situation today, but that in-built five-week wait poses major challenges for people in Scotland and the rest of the UK, and for those who are arriving from Ukraine. That is another argument for why the UK Government needs to resolve the structural issues with universal credit, which I campaigned hard on in a previous life.

Mr Tyler-Greig has already raised the second issue that I want to raise. The Scottish welfare fund is available for people who arrive from Ukraine, particularly to fill the gap with the five-week wait for universal credit from the DWP. We have provided support and guidance to local authorities to ensure that that money is made available to people who arrive from Ukraine.

Obviously, we are doing everything that we can through Social Security Scotland for people who have more complex issues and entitlements to Scottish social security to ensure that the range of entitlements that are available in Scotland is articulated to the welcome hubs, and that that is all progressed and processed as people arrive and go through the hubs.

**Donald Cameron:** Conversations between you and the consul general would be really helpful in that regard.

Finally, I want to reiterate the points that Sarah Boyack and Maurice Golden made about the various issues that have arisen in submissions—principally the one from COSLA but also the one from Highland Council. They appear to be very much about the provision of information from the Scottish Government to local authorities. I do not know whether the committee can provide you with those points in due course.

COSLA makes certain points about challenges that the matching service faces, which include the complexity of cases and the fact that there is a lack of available matching properties for many large families. It talks about the requirement for a property to be near a job or a place of education, as well as the issues of pets and transport. It is clear that a number of issues are arising in the matching service and the supersponsorship scheme. It is important that the Scottish Government is aware of those issues and is able to resolve them as best it can.

That is not really a question; it is just a final observation. Please feel free to come back on it, minister.

**Neil Gray:** I am happy to address Mr Cameron's statement, which, as he has articulated, follows on from the questions of Ms Boyack and Mr Golden. I

will bring in Will Tyler-Greig to address the issue of communications with Highland Council.

I reiterate that the Scottish Government, local government and our third sector partners are doing everything that we can. We are working together to drive more pace in the matching service. I have articulated some of the challenges—which Mr Cameron agrees exist—in relation to the resource-intensive nature of the process, the discussions that are required about whether expressions of interest are still live and what the expectations are of people, whether that is people from Ukraine or hosts in Scotland. That takes time.

As I said, I am keen—especially following my visit to Poland—that we redouble our efforts to ensure that the process proceeds at pace and that we do everything possible to make it a success and avoid the need to provide a pause, as has been necessary in Wales.

Will Tyler-Greig will be able to talk about the direct communications that there have been with local authorities.

**Will Tyler-Greig:** Much of the programme is data driven. We understand how many properties are being entered on to the national matching service system, and we can encourage pace around that. The minister has talked about the investment that has been made to encourage local authorities to use innovative approaches to get more properties on to the system more quickly. The middle bit is the matching.

Again, we share all data with COSLA, and COSLA talks to us regularly about the actions that it thinks that it could take to speed up the pace of matching. Matching is not a clerical one-in, one-out process. The minister has alluded to the fact that a lot of the work is driven by human relationships. People may have preferences and will voice a choice, and that will be taken into account.

We know what level of performance we need to hit in the national matching service. COSLA is at the table in those discussions, so I expect that the actions that it has raised in its evidence to the committee will come as no surprise. We are working hard to make those things happen.

We have not received any funding from the UK Government. However, we have issued letters of assurance to all councils to explain how, as we understand it, the UK Government funding system is supposed to work. Just before I came into the meeting, I heard that all councils now have UK Government claim forms for thank-you payments and tariff payments. I would be happy to pick that up directly with Highland Council after today's meeting.

**Neil Gray:** I hope that that provides further clarity, especially on the funding issue. Local authorities are only now getting the claim forms. We have had to provide letters of comfort, particularly around the £200 payment. That highlights the challenges that we have faced in knowing and confirming what will be happening as regards funding from a UK Government perspective.

We are working closely with UK Government ministers—in that regard, the relationship is positive. However, there are often challenging conversations about ensuring that the rhetoric is matched with action. We need to ensure that the funding scenario is resolved at a greater pace, because that is at least part of local government's concern.

**Sarah Boyack:** I have a supplementary question to Mark Ruskell's comments about access to buses. The COSLA paper includes statistics on the number of people already in Scotland through other asylum and humanitarian schemes. I just wanted to add a human touch. Last week, I met Ukrainian people who had come to Scotland, and one of them told me that, in Ukraine, the cost of a bus trip is the equivalent of 10p in Scottish money. There is a cultural and financial gap for them, which I think is making people quite anxious.

**Neil Gray:** I understand that perfectly. Most people arriving from Ukraine have had their lives turned upside down. Often, their property has been destroyed and their finances have been ripped apart, sometimes to get here in the first place. They face huge challenges, and, clearly, we want to do everything that we can to provide the support that is required to allow them to re-establish their lives. Transport is one element, and we are investing in many others to do everything possible to ensure that they are able to re-establish their lives in Scotland for as long as they want to call Scotland their home.

**The Convener:** Earlier, Mr Mankovskyi mentioned access to nursery places and access to free places for children over three. However, of course, the legislation in Scotland provides places to vulnerable two-year-olds as well. Have you had conversations with local authorities about assessing children from the displaced community to ensure that vulnerable two-year-olds also get that free nursery education?

**Neil Gray:** I will put my answer in the context of all the challenges that we have already set out for local government. However, we are working in partnership with local government on the issues. On access to childcare and the issue of school catchment areas that Mr Mankovskyi raised, I ask local authorities to use their flexibility and discretion to the absolute maximum to make

people's arrival in Scotland as warm, supportive and understanding as possible.

**The Convener:** Finally, in my opening question to the consul general I asked about what happens when there is a breakdown in a placement. There have been cases of people seeking a new sponsor on social media, possibly exposing themselves as a vulnerable family in that context. What reassurance can you give to people who face such situations that the Scottish Government is there to step in and that support is available without their having to use social media outlets?

**Neil Gray:** I am grateful to you, convener, for sending that particular case to me and for asking that question, because it gives me the opportunity to once again say in no uncertain terms that nobody in Scotland needs to use social media to find private matches. That is the whole point of the supersponsor scheme—it makes the process safer. We do not need people running the risk presented by well-meaning social media pages that offer matching or re-matching services. Those are not needed in Scotland.

The Scottish Government will match people, and if a match breaks down, they should contact their welcome hub, local resettlement team, the Scottish Government or their MSP, but they do not need to use social media sites. I have major safeguarding concerns about those sites, and I have articulated to UK ministers my concerns about that, the prevalence of such sites elsewhere in the UK and the fact that they are posing a major risk to the homes for Ukraine scheme elsewhere. I cannot stress enough the fact that people should not use social media to find private matches. That is not necessary in Scotland.

**The Convener:** I thank the minister and his officials for attending. The committee will move into private session for the final agenda item.

10:59

*Meeting continued in private until 11:12.*

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