

## **Hong Kong Welcome Hub Year 4 Strategy**

### **Summary and Recommendations**

As the Strategic Migration Partnership for Scotland, COSLA receives grant funding from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to facilitate the integration and welcome of British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa holders from Hong Kong. This paper updates the Board on the third year of delivery, the continuation of the grant funding, and proposals for our strategy for Year 4.

This paper invites the Community Wellbeing Board to:

- i. Note the work undertaken and in progress in Year 3 to support the integration of BN(O) Migrants in Scotland;
- ii. Note the continued funding of the programme; and
- iii. Approve the strategy for Year 4 outlined in paragraph 7 and suggest any other areas where support would be welcomed.

### **References**

Previous reports on the Hong Kong BNO Welcome Hub:

- 2021-01-25 LD/21/10 – Migration from Hong Kong to Scotland
- 2021-04-30 LD/21/81 – Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Visa
- 21-05-21 CWB Board 7.1 – Hong Kong British National Overseas Visa
- 21-09-17 CWB Board 3.4 – Hong Kong Action Plan
- 21-01-21 CWB Board 3.2 – Supporting Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Migrants
- 22-09-22 CWB Board 5.4 – Hong Kong Welcome Hub Year 2 Action Plan
- 23-06-09 CWB Board Item 4 - Hong Kong Welcome Hub Year 3 Strategy

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**June 2024**

## Hong Kong Welcome Hub Year 4 Strategy

### **Purpose**

1. COSLA receives grant funding from the Department for Housing, Levelling Up, and Communities (DHLUC) to facilitate the integration and welcome of British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) visa holders from Hong Kong. This paper summarises the integration activities undertaken in Year 3 and seeks approval for – and comments on – the proposed strategy for Year 4.

### **Background**

2. On 31 January 2021, following the Chinese Government's introduction of the national security law in Hong Kong, the UK Government launched a visa route for British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) status holders and their family members. The route reflects the UK's historic and moral commitment to those people from Hong Kong who chose to retain their ties to the UK by taking up BN(O) status before Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. More information on the background of the visa can be found [here](#).
3. Under the route, those with BN(O) status and their eligible family members can apply to come to the UK to [live, study and work](#) in virtually any capacity, on a [pathway to citizenship](#). After five years in the UK, BN(O) status holders and their family members will be able to apply for settlement, followed by citizenship after a further twelve months.

### **Current Position**

4. It remains difficult to predict how many BN(O)s are currently living in Scotland. It was initially forecasted that around 6.8% of all BN(O) visa applicants would settle in Scotland. The data now being used by DLUHC is based on a [survey](#) undertaken by Welcoming Committee for Hongkongers (WC4HK) which estimates that around 4% of Hong Kong BN(O)s live in Scotland. Using the 4% of BN(O) population figure, this would estimate that between 5,000 and 7,000 Hongkongers have arrived in Scotland since January 2021. However, the survey data is limited by a limited pool of respondents (2,089 people completed the survey) and there is no clear and accurate data on where Hong Kong BN(O)s are living in the UK. Further detail on possible settlement patterns in each council area are provided in the Annex.
5. During Year 3 of the project, COSLA officers undertook the following activities, in line with the previously approved Hong Kong Welcome Hub Action Plan for Year 3:
  - Continued to update our online Hong Kong Welcome Hub, with both migrant-facing resources and guidance for local authority staff engaging with Hong Kong BN(O)s;

- Funded **ESOL & Employment projects** in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Midlothian, and online courses for those in other areas. In total, all projects will provide around 100 Hongkongers with English Language and Employment support;
- Funded **two Hongkonger-led community organisations** to deliver educational, social and cultural events as well as providing more individualised support. Between them they have reached over 500 people through individual enquiries or attending events, and have reached 1000s through online information sharing;
- Organised and co-led with International Organization for Migration (IOM) **Information Sessions for Local Authority officers** and third sector organisations on Hong Kong BN(O) visa holders in Scotland, including information on No Recourse to Public Funds and Change of Conditions applications;
- Continued sharing our Hong Kong **Welcome Newsletter** with guidance, resources, and details about upcoming events for BN(O)s;
- Responded to around **60 queries** from – or on behalf of – Hongkongers living in Scotland during the period of August 2023 to June 2024;
- Continued to offer IOM **caseworker support** to provide OISC regulated immigration advice to vulnerable migrants from Hong Kong;
- **Engaged with VCSE (Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise) groups** funded by DLUHC and signposting Hongkongers to available and relevant support; and
- Worked with BN(O) Leads from **other Strategic Migration Partnerships** across the UK, as well as engaging with local authorities, DHLUC and Home Office, influencing policy and practice in line with the needs of Hong Kong BN(O)s.

## What is changing?

### Funding

6. DLUHC have confirmed that funding for the Welcome Hub in Scotland will be continued for a fourth year, running from August 2024 to July 2025. In previous years the funding amount was £254,000. We anticipate funding will be reduced by around £60,000 for the year ahead. Funding distribution for the first three years was based on predictions of where Hong Kong BN(O)s would move to but, as highlighted above, DLUHC now estimates around 4% of Hongkongers are living in Scotland and plan to adjust the proportion of funding accordingly. We await final confirmation of this from DLUHC.
7. In previous years, DHLUC funded National VCSE organisations to provide support across the UK and, in addition, funded regional VCSEs in England. In Year 4, DHLUC are not funding any regional VCSEs. However, they will fund two national VCSEs to lead a consortium on two key areas: Mental Health and Wellbeing; and Employability. The work of the national VCSEs will cover England exclusively in Year 4. Scottish Government will receive consequentials from this expenditure.

### Changes to the Immigration Rules

8. On 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024, the UK Government published a [Statement of changes to the Immigration Rules](#). This includes, among other changes:
  - For Hong Kong BN(O) visas where the NRPF condition has been successfully removed, this removal will remain in place in BN(O) visa extensions;

- Adult Dependent Relatives on the BN(O) route can apply later to join the main applicant where there has been a change in circumstances;
- Removal of the requirement for partners and adult dependent relatives to have their permission end on the same date as the main applicant; and
- Those who are on immigration bail solely because they have claimed asylum in the UK are able to apply on the BN(O) route.

### **Proposed COSLA Position**

9. Our proposed approach to Year 4 funding is based on research, reports from local authority staff, funded organisations and feedback from Hong Kongers. For example, the [WC4HK's research](#) suggests that 12% of Hongkongers are out of work and actively seeking it, and that overall the employment rate of just over 52% compares to the current UK national rate of 76%. Additionally, all of the grant funded organisations from Year 3 have raised unemployment as a key issue facing Hongkongers in Scotland. This has guided our proposed focus on ESOL and employability.
10. For Year 4, we intend to pursue the following key activities, incorporating learning from research, survey findings and partner reports into the programme design:
  - Build on the success of the ESOL & Employment projects by continuing such work for a third year;
  - Continue a community fund for local Hongkonger-led projects supporting local communities;
  - Continue to support Hong Kong BN(O)s with information about change of conditions and signpost to immigration advice services and support where needed;
  - Continue to create and share guidance via the Welcome Hub and the newsletter;
  - Disseminate relevant guidance to local authorities; and
  - Continue to engage with national partners on opportunities to engage with Hongkongers.
11. Board members' views are sought, both on the activities outlined above, and any other areas where councils would welcome support regarding the integration of BN(O) visa holders in local communities.

### **Next Steps**

12. Subject to the agreement of the Board, we will proceed with the Year 4 strategy as outlined in paragraph 10 and will bring further updates to the Board as appropriate.

**June 2024**

## Contribution to agreed COSLA Plan and Verity House Agreement:

<a href="#">COSLA Plan 22-27</a>	<b>Priority Areas</b>	
	Strengthen Local Democracy	
	Secure Sustainable Funding	
	Improve the Wellbeing of Individuals, Families and Communities	✓
	Enhance Education and Support for our Children and Young People	
	Deliver a Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	
	Support the Most Vulnerable in our Communities	✓
<a href="#">Verity House Agreement</a>	<b>Shared Priorities</b>	
	Tackling Poverty	✓
	Just transition to net zero	
	Sustainable Public Services	