

Brexit: The Settlement Process and Engagement with EU Citizens

Policy Development

To advise members of recent COSLA activity relating to the settlement process and engagement with EU citizens.

Summary and Recommendations

COSLA and Scottish local government value the benefits EU citizens have brought to our communities. We are committed to lessening the sense of uncertainty amongst those EU citizens living in Scotland, and are working with Scottish Government and UK Government to do all we can to alleviate the concerns that have been generated from the decision to leave the EU.

The Board is invited to:

- i. Note and support COSLA's current and planned work with local authorities and ministers on engaging EU citizens in our communities;
- ii. Note the key concerns raised by EU citizens during the regional engagement events;
- iii. Note COSLA's work with the Home Office regarding the EU settlement scheme and agree to the continuation of this work;
- iv. Note and discuss the Home Office presentation on the settlement scheme; and
- v. Agree and support COSLA's planned partnership work with the European Commission.

References

Previous reports:

- Brexit Update – Leaders, January 2017
- Migration: Implications for Local Authorities – Leaders, January 2017
- Brexit Update & Mandate – Leaders, February 2017
- Stocktake Report on UK Withdrawal from the EU (Brexit) – Leaders, August 2017
- UK Withdrawal from the EU: Governance and Update – Leaders, October 2017
- Migration Policy: Brexit Implications – Leaders, November 2017
- Response to Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) call for evidence: EEA-workers in the UK Labour Market – CWB Board, December 2017

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May 2018



Brexit: the settlement process and engagement work with EU citizens

Current COSLA Position

1. COSLA and Scottish local government's position is migrants make a valuable contribution to our workforce, our economy, and our communities, and that Scotland should be a welcoming place. We acknowledge and value the benefits EU citizens have brought to our communities. We are committed to lessening the anxiety amongst those EU citizens living in Scotland with a sense of uncertainty and will work with Scottish Government and UK Government to do all we can to alleviate the concerns that have been generated from the UK leaving the EU.

Policy Development

Scottish Ministers and Local Authorities Regional Engagement Events

2. In September 2017, Cllr Kelly Parry met with the Minister for International Development and Europe, Dr Alasdair Allan and part of their discussion was on the issue of EU citizens' rights. It was agreed that Scottish local authorities and Scottish Ministers are keen to lessen anxiety amongst EU citizens currently living in Scotland and communicate the benefits they have brought to our culture, economy and society.
3. As a result of this discussion, and with the agreement of Leaders in November 2017, COSLA's Migration, Population and Diversity Team is working the Scottish Government's Migration and Free Movement of People Unit's work to deliver regional engagement events for EU citizens. The aim of the events is to provide a platform for Council Leaders and Scottish Ministers (Dr Allan and Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs) to communicate and reinforce messages on the value we place on EU citizens in Scotland and their contribution to our communities. The events are primarily an opportunity to hear the views and concerns of EU citizens living in Scotland in order to shape Scottish Government and COSLA's positions and best protect their interests.
4. To date, three regional events have taken place, hosted by Fife Council, Dundee City Council and Glasgow City Council. The events have been well attended, with a wide range of EU nationals represented in the audiences. This has included nationals of both 'old' and 'new' EU countries, and people who have been in Scotland for both short and long periods of time. The audiences have been very engaged and informed on the Brexit debate and the events have generated useful and informative discussions, as well as very powerful accounts of the contribution that EU migrants have made, and continue to make. For instance, there have been profound comments from people who have lived in Scotland for decades, contributed to our economy and chosen to have and bring up their children in Scotland, but who now believe that their right to be here is being questioned and their contribution undervalued.

5. The events have provided an excellent opportunity to understand people's key concerns. The overwhelming feeling throughout all the events is of uncertainty and concern. Some of the key points raised include the following:
 - Questions around the settlement process – this has been the priority issue in all of the events. This has been in relation to accessing information/advice; seeking clarity on the position beyond the transition period; people's experiences of the bureaucracy of the current system; the cost of settlement; documentation required for proof of stay; and other negative (and some positive) experiences of applying for permanent residence or citizenship;
 - A fear of returning to arrangements similar to those which existed during the accession period, and going back to 'second-class citizen' status. Particular concerns were raised around rights and entitlements, where complex systems are created that are difficult to understand and susceptible to different interpretations, and which could lead to a lack of consistency of approach;
 - Questions about impacts on local businesses, in terms of workforce and the value of the pound;
 - Concerns about the generally negative tone of discourse around Brexit and migration, both from politicians and the media;
 - For some, a feeling of distrust in political messages; and
 - Concerns about the impact on children who are listening to information through media, which is creating confusion and anxiety.
6. COSLA and Scottish Government have agreed to carry out 4-5 more regional events and COSLA has approached, or will shortly be approaching, a number of local authorities to discuss the possibility of them becoming involved. Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Council have already agreed to host a joint event.

Home Office – EU Settlement Scheme

7. COSLA has also been working closely with the Home Office about the EU Settlement Scheme. The Home Office is designing a system to give EU citizens who are already living in the UK 'settled status'. COSLA is represented on a Home Office officer group, which includes Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Cabinet Office, Territorial Offices, and the Welsh, Northern Ireland and English LGAs. The group has been set up to discuss the Settlement Scheme and how we can all work together to ensure that EU citizens living in the UK are informed and know what they need to do as we approach the launch of the scheme later this year.
8. This has been a useful platform for COSLA to raise some of the concerns we have collated from our regional engagement events, and we will work with the Home Office to attempt to remedy some of these concerns and communicate the solutions to EU citizens. The Home Office has assured us the application process will be streamlined and 'user-friendly', the cost will be low, and the eligibility criteria will be simplified. The Home Office has also created a group to look at particular groups who may have difficulty securing settled status. COSLA will ensure that we are also linked in to this group.
9. The Home Office has agreed to provide a short presentation at this meeting and civil servants will look to answer any questions which members might have.

Partnership work with the European Commission

10. The Representation of the European Commission in the UK would like to assist local community organisations that represent or work with EU citizens in the UK to provide information on EU citizens' rights in the context of Brexit. The Commission is funding the EU Citizen's Rights Project to deliver four events in Scotland (Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow).
11. The Commission has approached COSLA to look at how we can work together more effectively. The Commission has introduced the idea of a joint event for local authority officers working with EU citizens. This is at the very early stages of planning, but members' views on the utility of this work would be welcomed.

Summary and recommendations

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13. The Board is invited to:
 - i. Note and support COSLA's current and planned work with local authorities and ministers on engaging EU citizens in our communities;
 - ii. Note the key concerns raised by EU citizens during the regional engagement events;
 - iii. Note COSLA's work with the Home Office regarding the EU settlement scheme and agree to the continuation of this work;
 - iv. Note and discuss the Home Office, Strategic Communications, presentation on the settlement scheme, and;
 - v. Agree and support COSLA's planned partnership work with the European Commission.

May 2018