

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

9th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Tuesday 25 April 2023

Asylum Seekers in Scotland

Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. As part of its work programme discussion at its meeting on [Tuesday 17 January 2023](#), the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee agreed to undertake some work with a focus on race inequality in Scotland with a view to undertaking a short inquiry.

Background

2. Predecessor committees have undertaken inquiries on race inequality, with the Session 5 Committee focusing on [race equality, employment and skills](#) as well as looking at the impact of destitution on asylum seekers and those with insecure immigration status – [Hidden Lives - new beginnings: destitution, asylum and insecure immigration status in Scotland](#)
3. The Scottish Government and COSLA's [Ending Destitution Strategy](#) (31 March 2021) aims to improve support for people with No Recourse to Public Funds in Scotland, It is in response to the former committee's report. The Scottish Government has since published the [Ending Destitution Together: progress report – year one 2021 to 2022](#) (23 December 2022).
4. To inform its consideration the Committee held an evidence session on [Tuesday 7 February 2023](#), where it heard from stakeholders and grassroots organisations. The purpose of this broad session was to inform the Committee of key issues and assist it in identifying a focus for a short inquiry.
5. At its work programme discussion on [Tuesday 28 March](#), the Committee agreed that it would direct its focus initially on asylum seekers, refugees and people with insecure immigration status building on work undertaken by its predecessor Committee and monitoring progress made in the Scottish Government's Ending Destitution Strategy.
6. One area that Members wish to focus on particularly, are issues arising from the housing of asylum seekers in hotels, the lack of community engagement

preceding these and the “flashpoints” which have resulted. These have been reported widely in recent press.

7. While the decision of where to house asylum seekers is a reserved matter, the Committee is keen to explore the impacts of the current asylum system upon those seeking asylum, local communities, local authorities and private contractors.
8. It will also consider current funding and where public monies could be most effectively directed as well as exploring the provision and availability of access to wider support and advice.

Evidence session

9. This session on 25 April 2022 will be the first of two sessions where the Committee will hear evidence from charities, organisations supporting asylum seekers and human rights regulators.

Participants

10. The following people will be taking part in the evidence session—

- Phil Arnold, Head of Refugee Support – Scotland, Wales and N Ireland, British Red Cross
- Annika Joy, Programme Director, Simon Community Scotland
- Graham O’Neill, Policy Manager, Scottish Refugee Council and;
- Andy Sirel, Legal Director and Partner, JustRight Scotland

Format

11. The meeting will be held in person.

Topics

12. This session on Asylum Seekers in Scotland will be a chance to discuss topics such as

- The impact of current and proposed legislation on asylum seekers and on service providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- The experiences for asylum seekers in Scotland in terms of their rights and entitlements and what impact the proposed Illegal Migration Bill may have on those
- The use of hotel accommodation to house asylum seekers and the impact on local communities, local authorities and local service providers
- The range of support services available for asylum seekers in Scotland

- What differences there are between the experiences of asylum seekers in Scotland and the rest of the UK
- What impact the Scottish Government's Ending Destitution Strategy and the New Scots Strategy is having on the experience of asylum seekers
- What more could be done to assist asylum seekers integrate into local communities.

Next Steps

13. At next week's meeting, the Committee will continue to hear evidence from charities and organisations who support asylum seekers in Scotland. Thereafter, the Committee has agreed to hold further sessions to hear from public authorities with responsibilities within the asylum system in Scotland.

14. The Committee will discuss the evidence it has heard at today's session in private and agree on any issues it wishes to explore further

Clerks to the Committee
April 2023