

# Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

12th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Tuesday 16 May 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 to 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 sessions

9. At its meeting on [25 April 2023](#) the Committee heard from representatives from the [British Red Cross](#), [Simon Community Scotland](#), [The Scottish Refugee Council](#) and [JustRight Scotland](#).
10. At its meeting on [2 May 2023](#) the Committee heard from representatives from [Refugees for Justice](#), [Maryhill Integration Network](#), [Refuweege](#), [Friends of Scottish Settlers](#), [Grampian Regional Equality Council](#) and [the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland](#).
11. At its meeting on [9 May 2023](#) the Committee heard from representatives from public authorities, or those who have responsibilities within the asylum system. It took evidence from [TARA - Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance](#); [Police Scotland](#), [COSLA](#), [Perth & Kinross Council](#), [Glasgow Psychological Trauma Service](#), NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, [Inverclyde Council](#) and [Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership](#).
12. At today’s meeting, the Committee will hear from the Home Office’s main contractors in Scotland.

## Participants

13. The following people will be taking part in today’s evidence session—
  - Caroline O’Connor, Chief Executive Officer, Migrant Help
  - John Taylor, Chief Operating Officer, Mears Housing Management

## Format

14. The meeting will be held in hybrid format with some Members and witnesses attending in person and others joining the session virtually.

## Topics

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

- The impact of the Illegal Migration Bill on the current support provided to asylum seekers in Scotland and what plans are in place to address any consequences
- What support is given to victims of human trafficking and exploitation in Scotland, and what might the impact be on the support as a result of the Illegal Migration Bill
- The use of hotels to house asylum seekers and what data is held in terms of gender, age and nationality of those seeking asylum
- Whether more can be done to reduce the time spent in hotels by asylum seekers and what support is provided to them during their stay
- Issues relating to the housing of unaccompanied minors who seek asylum in Scotland
- The rights and entitlements of those seeking asylum in Scotland and what support is available to those who have their applications refused
- Relationships between Home Office contractors and local authorities including financial arrangements and how funds are distributed
- Issues with community relationships and whether there is sufficient access to support and services
- Involvement with the current Scottish Government's strategies - New Scots and the Ending Destitution strategy
- Measures that could be taken to improve the lives of asylum seekers in Scotland.

## Next steps

16. 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**  
**May 2023**