

Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

15th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Tuesday 20 June 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 its meeting on [16 May 2023](#) the Committee heard from the Home Office’s main contractors in Scotland [Migrant Help](#) and from [Mears Housing Management](#).
13. The Committee also held two informal engagement sessions on 6 and 13 June 2023 with asylum seekers to hear first-hand from those with lived experience of navigating the system.
14. At today’s meeting the Committee will conclude its evidence taking on this inquiry when it will hear from
 - Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, Asylum Inquiry Scotland, and finally from;
 - Emma Roddick, Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, Alison Byrne, Director for Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights (Interim) and Aileen Harding, Policy Manager, Asylum and Refugee Integration, Scottish Government.

Format

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

Topics

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

- The key findings of the Asylum Inquiry chaired by Baroness Kennedy and the Scottish Government's response;
- The impact of the Illegal Migration Bill on the current support provided to asylum seekers in Scotland;
- The use of hotels for housing asylum seekers and whether this has the potential to increase the likelihood of trafficking and exploitation;
- Whether the needs of asylum seeker are being addressed in relation to the provision of free travel, ESOL and interpreters;
- What is being done to support the third sector so that they can continue to provide support to asylum seekers in Scotland;
- Relationships between Home Office contractors, statutory agencies and in the community with local organisations including financial arrangements and how funds are distributed;
- What support is being provided once people are granted refugee status;
- The Guardianship service and extension to tuition fee funding announced recently by the Scottish Government;
- What more the Scottish Government could do within its devolved competence;
- Current Scottish Government's strategies such as New Scots and the Ending Destitution strategy.

Next steps

17. The Committee will discuss the evidence it has heard at today's session in private and agree on next steps.

**Clerks to the Committee
June 2023**