Dear Ms McKelvie

Please find enclosed Angus Council’s response to calls for views on destitution and asylum in Scotland following your email dated 1 March 2017.

As a public service provider, what support are you able to provide to asylum seekers and what are the main barriers to providing support?

Angus Council works with the Angus Health and Social Care Partnership regarding Humanitarian Aid programmes. Discussions have taken place with the Home Office and COSLA to discuss the potential for Angus to take part in a widening of the asylum seekers dispersal scheme, the children at risk scheme and the unaccompanied asylum seeking children scheme. Following these discussions, Angus Council and the Angus Health and Social Care Partnership have agreed to take part in all of the schemes, but due to the barriers identified below to providing support in Angus we feel we could start only with a limited number of places for asylum seekers on a pilot basis. The main barriers identified to providing support are:

- Our current commitment to the Syrian Refugee programme and the resources being utilised to support this. Since December 2015 Angus has resettled a total of 8 Syrian refugee families (33 individuals) and is expecting another 2 families in the near future. We need to look at all our Humanitarian Aid programmes together, and not separately, as they will all impact on similar resources.
- Lack of local knowledge and expertise to support asylum seekers.
- Potential language challenges, limited local interpreter services that do not have the capacity required, and the cost of these services.
- Local accommodation and housing capacity.
- Limited capacity within local foster care homes/children’s’ home places and a risk of de-stablising current care systems and aftercare support services in Angus.
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- No funding for local authorities, partnerships or health boards for some of the programmes and reducing funding for others which does not help to negate the increased risk of homelessness and the potential resource requirement via homelessness services. Unknown longer term cost implications due to potential outcomes of asylum applications and the consequent processes for people to be either assimilated into the UK or be deported.
- The length of the asylum application process and the location of centres that deal with this.
- If asylum applications are successful there is a big risk of individuals becoming homeless due to most SERCO accommodation contracts ceasing after 3 years.

How a person’s need for support is assessed and what would make this assessment process easier. Please make reference to any policies and procedures within your organisation.

We do not yet have experience of asylum seekers but would propose to use a similar assessment process to that used with the Syrian refugee programme. That includes a collaborative assessment process with a relevant agencies round the table. For the refugees this has included housing, education, community services, social work, health, police, voluntary agencies and Angus Refugee support for example. With asylum seekers we would adopt the same collaborative approach having identified the required stakeholders. We are clear that asylum seekers have very different needs to the Syrian refugees, it is the similar collaborative approach to assessment we feel would be effective here. In relation to asylum seekers we would also propose to ensure that the locations of specific properties would be the subject of local risk assessments by community partners and family profiles would also be undertaken where appropriate. The assessment process would be made easier by the publishing of some national guidance to ensure a consistent and appropriate approach is taken across Partnerships – particularly for those with little or no experience of these programmes.

Angus Council have written Human Rights guidance in place for staff and also have a public leaflet available. NHS Tayside has an “Embracing Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Policy” which inform how we would approach supporting Asylum seekers in Angus.

If your area does not have experience of asylum seekers, it would be helpful to know what policies, guidance or procedures are in place or are being developed to address support for asylum seekers.

As above.

With regard to no recourse to public funds

Since asylum seekers are not allowed to work we cannot provide any effective welfare benefits advice.
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Other related issues – if an asylum seeker (or other person with no recourse, such as a failed asylum seeker) becomes a member of a couple and the other member of the couple is dependent on, or becomes dependent on, benefits then in practice a situation may arise where 2 adults live off a single person’s benefit or that of 1 adult. Matters can be even worse when housing benefit is involved.

If asylum seekers were allowed to work then that would have significant practical advantages in benefit terms.

Funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) would be helpful as would funding for the provision of link workers. This would also help ensure that once someone’s application was accepted and they had status, benefit claims could be made immediately.

I hope this is helpful in responding to you.

Yours sincerely

Richard Stiff
Chief Executive