Dear Chief Executive,

Call for views on destitution and asylum in Scotland

As you may be aware, the Scottish Parliament’s Equalities and Human Rights Committee is intending to examine the issue of destitution and asylum in Scotland.

The Committee’s focus is about how public services mitigate the impact of destitution on asylum seekers. The British Red Cross estimates\(^1\) over 700 people presented as destitute in Glasgow in 2015. When asylum seekers have no means of support they often rely on friends, charities or sleep rough. People who are destitute are also more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

While Glasgow has been the sole dispersal area in Scotland, a small number of people in the asylum process who do not require housing and/or support continue to live in different local authority areas\(^2\). A letter from Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP,

\(^1\) Submission to the EHRIC from British Red Cross (Scotland), Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, Scottish Refugee Council, Scottish Women’s Aid and Engender on development of the Committee’s work programme: http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Equal_Opps/General%20Documents/British_Red_Cross_Scotland_Children_and_Young_Peoples_Commissioner_Scotland.pdf

then Minister for Immigration, to the Home Affairs Committee listed all local authorities in the UK which housed asylum seekers in dispersal accommodation in January 2016. In addition to Glasgow, this included Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire.

There have been discussions between the Scottish Government and the Home Office to increase the number of local authorities in Scotland involved in dispersal of asylum seekers.

To further inform the Committee’s work, I am writing to NHS Boards, Integrated Joint Boards and Local Authorities to invite views on current policy and practice. When answering the questions below it would be helpful, if appropriate, if you would cover the issues of No Recourse to Public Funds and Human Rights Assessments in your response.

The specific questions that the Committee would like your input on are:

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

- We’d also like to hear about 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.

- 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 being developed to address support for asylum seekers.

The Committee requests you respond, in writing, by close of business on Wednesday 8 March 2017. Please email your written response to equalities.humanrights@parliament.scot.

If you have any questions, please contact the Committee Clerks on 0131 348 5223, or by email at equalities.humanrights@parliament.scot.

Yours sincerely,

Christina McKelvie
Convener
Equalities and Human Rights Committee

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