Dear Ms McKelvie

Calls for Views on Destitution and Asylum in Scotland

Thank you for your correspondence of 31st January 2017 regarding the above.

North Ayrshire Council does not currently participate in the asylum dispersal programme. I can also confirm that we have had no presentations from asylum seekers who are destitute and have no recourse to public funds.

The Council is committed to humanitarian protection and has participated in the Afghan Relocation Scheme and the Syrian Resettlement Programme. In addition, following an urgent request from CoSLA to accommodate unaccompanied asylum seeking children being displaced from Calais camps the Council agreed to provide a place of safety for up to 6 children. Five children originally from Sudan aged 14 – 16 arrived at the end of November 2016. They are currently being looked after and accommodated by the Council. They are all now engaged in education, ESOL training and are being supported by staff to meet their requirements in submitting claims for asylum.

I comment below on the three specific questions raised in your letter from a North Ayrshire perspective:

1. The Home Office has asked the Council to participate in the wider dispersal programme. Serious consideration was given to this request and during 2016 chief officers met with CoSLA, the Home Office and their contractor Serco. They provided detailed explanation of how asylum seekers could be dispersed from initial accommodation in Glasgow, the ratio of staff to service users and the ongoing support offered. It was noted that there is no ESOL provision within the support contract. There is no funding available to local authorities to provide any additional or enhanced services.

In our experience extensive support, at least initially, and reducing as time progresses, is required to ensure individuals well-being following the traumatic experiences associated with leaving their country of origin. Further support in respect of English language skills is essential to their integration and move to self-support status. Support provided through the Government’s contract is limited and has a strong reliance upon specialist support from the 3rd sector. The essential 3rd sector support provision that has built up over time that exists in Glasgow for all asylum seekers including failed cases is not currently available in North Ayrshire and would require development.

The Council’s view .........
The Council's view is that the support offered to asylum seekers through the Home Office contract does not meet the standard provided to refugees in North Ayrshire and as a result if we participated in the programme would see vulnerable people receiving differing levels of support for their well-being and integration. Therefore, on the 20th December 2016 after careful consideration the Council agreed to pause progress on this initiative while we explore with the Home Office how appropriate support could be developed. However, the Home Office have been fairly clear that funding for Councils to provide essential support services is neither available nor likely to be forthcoming.

2. There have been no approaches from asylum seekers for support in North Ayrshire and there are currently no specific policy and procedures in place that refer to asylum seekers. However, North Ayrshire’s Health & Social Care Partnership would take the lead role in providing support and relevant staff have been trained in the Council’s responsibilities to those who have no recourse to public funds and our additional legal responsibilities in accordance with Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968.

3. As North Ayrshire Council has not yet had any experience of asylum seekers we would welcome guidance from the Scottish Government to inform policies, guidance and procedures to ensure consistent service delivery across Scotland.

I hope this information is of assistance to you and the work of the Equalities and Human Rights Committee and if I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Hatton
Executive Director (Place)