Dear Ms McKelvie,

Thank you for your letter of 31 January 2017 advising of the Committee’s work on the issue of destitution and asylum in Scotland.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Local Authority for the Outer Hebrides, submits the following points:

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

The Comhairle has previously responded to Government’s request to consider being a dispersal area for asylum seekers that, regrettably, the Comhairle is unable to meet the requirements, due to the lack of housing options and support systems in place outwith the public sector.

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.

N/A

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.

With reference also to point 1 above, in the unlikely circumstances that an asylum seeker presented as homeless, the Comhairle currently does not have a policy but would adopt the following course of action:

An asylum seeker presenting outside their “dispersed area” is likely to have had their application for asylum refused and is maybe in the process of having their claim reconsidered. Since there can be no recourse to public funds, the Comhairle would direct them to a solicitor who might be able to assist with their asylum case and to local charitable resources which would be able to help in relation to accommodation and food.

I hope that this information is of assistance; please do not hesitate to contact me should any further information be required.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Burr
Àrd-òllibear/Chief Executive
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar