

Glasgow City Council stands up for destitute asylum seekers

On Thursday 28 June 2012 Glasgow City Council overwhelmingly passed a motion condemning the UK Border Agency's policy of forcing people seeking asylum into destitution.

In only the second meeting of the full council in the City Chambers since the elections in May, 68 councillors from across the political spectrum voted in support of a motion by the SNPs Susan Aitken and an amendment by Labour's Matt Kerr calling on the UK Government to provide asylum seekers with financial support until they are granted status or leave the county to avoid abject destitution. The Chamber also called on the UK Government to change its policy to allow local authorities to assist asylum seekers in danger of destitution.

Councillor Susan Aitken moved that:

'Council condemns the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) policy of destitution and the eviction of refused asylum seekers that is increasing the strain on the charities and communities supporting their most basic needs. Council believes that the number of destitute asylum seekers now living on the streets of Glasgow represents a humanitarian crisis that requires an urgent response

Council endorses the Scottish Refugee Policy Forum conference report recommendation that all asylum seekers should be provided with UKBA cash support until they are granted status or leave the country.

Council therefore demands that the UK Government change existing rules which severely restrict local authorities in the support they can provide to failed asylum seekers. Council calls on the Chief Executive to write to the UK Government, seeking a change in policy to allow local authorities to assist refugees in danger of destitution."

In a supporting amendment Councillor Matt Kerr moved that:

"Glasgow City Council has a proud record of supporting asylum seekers and refugees, and will continue to do all in its power to welcome and enable them to play a full part in our city's story.

Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to UKBA demanding it changes its policy of destitution and instead take full responsibility for their actions. The people of Glasgow, no matter how welcoming, cannot be expected to pick up the pieces where UKBA fails.

Council therefore demands that the UK Government change existing rules which severely restrict local authorities in the support they can provide to failed asylum seekers. Council calls on the Chief Executive to write to the UK Government, seeking a change in policy to allow local authorities to assist refugees in danger of destitution.”

Councillor Kerr’s motion also requested that the Council write to the Scottish Government for funding to support the integration of people seeking asylum in Glasgow.

Gary Christie, Head of Policy and Communications at Scottish Refugee Council said:

“Glasgow City Council for over 10 years, with the support of all political parties, has provided a welcome and humane response to the arrival of people seeking asylum. The Council, statutory agencies, voluntary, community and faith organisations have all played a role in helping refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and contribute to Glasgow’s economic, cultural and social life. By taking this stand against asylum destitution, the Council is sending a strong message to the UK Government that its inhumane and ineffective policy of forcing people who have been refused asylum into abject poverty onto the streets of our city is utterly unacceptable to the people of Glasgow. We would strongly urge other councils across the UK to take the lead set by Glasgow in taking a stand against asylum destitution.”