



City of Sanctuary

stillhumanstillhere

The campaign to end destitution of refused asylum seekers

A joint commitment to action by Councils and Citizens towards ending the destitution of asylum seekers

We recognise the plight of asylum seekers forced to flee their home countries due to conflict and persecution. We are proud that our cities are welcoming and inclusive to people seeking sanctuary in the UK.

While their claim is being processed, asylum seekers receive basic accommodation and utilities, and minimal subsistence support. If their claim is refused, they lose all support, are left destitute and may become street homeless.

Destitution has a serious, long term impact on the individuals affected, many of whom will eventually become full members of our society. Addressing the consequences of their destitution falls to local authorities, local charities and the local communities in which they live and this should be recognised by central government.

In view of the above, we affirm our commitment to address asylum destitution in our local areas, and will consider the following options for addressing the destitution of asylum seekers. We will compile a report by the end of March 2016 on actions being taken.

Practical measures to be considered by councils:

1. Include destitution amongst asylum seekers and refugees in the authority's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which can inform the authority's homelessness strategy.
2. Ensure that Social Services work in partnership with the voluntary sector to identify asylum seekers who need support.

Ensure that powers under the 1948 National Assistance Act, the 1970 Chronically Sick and Disabled Act, the 2006 NHS Act, 1989 Children Act, 2014 Care Act, and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, are used progressively to assist asylum seekers who are vulnerable, and to avoid destitution.

3. Fund or provide relief to organisations who are in a position to support and help prevent the destitution of asylum seekers.
4. Appoint a strategic lead officer to ensure that the Council responds to the needs of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.
5. Via Health and Wellbeing Boards or similar, review whether the locally enhanced services contracted from GPs by clinical commissioners are providing adequate and effective services to asylum seekers and refugees.

Ensure that the mental health needs of destitute asylum seekers are considered as part of CCG commissioning arrangements.

7. Ensure that any child on asylum support or who is supported by the local authority is given free school meals.
8. Ensure that all council staff that are likely to have contact with asylum seekers receive training so that they are aware of the problems asylum seekers may face.
9. Provide and/or facilitate opportunities for asylum seekers to volunteer, including for projects which benefit the local community.
10. Provide and/or facilitate free English classes to asylum seekers and refugees.
11. Seek to improve the integration of refugees so they can fulfil their potential and contribute to local communities.
12. Encourage close working relationships with the voluntary sector to provide help, support and advice to applicants and enable a coordinated response to relevant issues.

Action to be taken in relation to central government

13. Write to the Home Secretary to express concern over the low level of support available to asylum seekers and the way the current policy leaves local authorities to address the consequences of destitution; ask for more support from central government; and support the goals of the national "Still Human, Still Here" campaign (a coalition of some 70 organisations, including the Church of England and Catholic Archbishop Conferences, Crisis, Oxfam, the Red Cross and several City Councils), which urges the Government to:
 - a) Provide asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute with sufficient cash support so that they can meet their essential living needs until they are returned to their country of origin or are given permission to stay in the UK;
 - b) Grant asylum seekers permission to work (without restriction on type of work) if their case has not been resolved within six months or they have been refused, but temporarily cannot be returned through no fault of their own ;
 - c) Provide free access to primary and secondary healthcare for all asylum seekers while they are in the UK;
 - d) Improve decision making so that all those in need of protection receive it and do not end up refused and destitute.
14. Seek support for this statement from other councils in the UK and the Local Government Association, and request that they raise these issues directly with central government.