

## DEPUTATION ONE – ASYLUM SUPPORT

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your Deputation.

MS G PHIRI: Thank you, Lord Mayor. My name is Grace Phiri and I am a Trustee of Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Networks. I am bringing this deputation to Leeds City Council today on behalf of ten charities in Leeds. Standing with me today is Peter from LASSN, Christine from PAFRAS, Elise from the Refugee Council and Rachel from Leeds Refugee Forum.

The welcoming and compassionate history of Leeds is known to all of us in this room. Some of you will have experienced this through your family histories. Others of you currently represent communities which, without doubt, have welcomed refugees from different countries who have fled persecution. Communities have subsequently benefited from the contribution these refugees have made to the economic and cultural life of Leeds.

At the end of September 2012, 309 asylum seekers were accommodated and supported in Leeds, with a further 14 getting subsistence-only support. A single adult asylum seeker receives just over £5 a day to pay for food, clothing, toiletries and other essentials. Without a legal right to work or any other source of income, many asylum seekers struggle to survive on this while waiting for decisions on their applications, but they are lucky when they are compared to those who have had their claims refused and are left completely destitute.

Many destitute asylum seekers are forced to sleep rough, with no access to public funds or any right to work to support themselves. This leaves them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. This inhumane situation affects people who have been victims of torture, those with experiences of sexual violence or other trauma, as well as pregnant women.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of destitute asylum seekers but only in the last year 261 new destitute asylum seekers have visited Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, a charity based in Harehills.

Many destitute asylum seekers survive through generous support from the host community, faith groups, charities and compassionate individuals across Leeds. These organisations and individuals run drop-ins in churches, the overnight hosting of asylum seekers, food banks and winter hardship funds. In this way, this city has done a lot to counter the effects of an asylum policy which leaves those seeking protection in this country with either inadequate support to live on or no support at all.

We believe this practice has a devastating effect on the lives of individuals seeking sanctuary in this city, both in terms of their health and wellbeing but also in terms of their ability to pursue their asylum application and properly present their case for needing protection in the UK.

Leeds citizens from every postcode signed up to the City of Sanctuary pledge and we are standing in front of you today in a Chamber which only a few years ago voted to become a City of Sanctuary and to welcome those fleeing persecution and injustice.

We are asking the Leeds City Council Executive to look into the issue of asylum support and the destitution of asylum seekers and the impact it has on the lives of individuals across Leeds city, and to write to Home Secretary to outline its concerns.

We also urge Leeds City Council to support the recommendations from the recent cross party Parliamentary Report on Asylum Support for Children, of which the Bishop of Ripon and Leeds was a member, and also to endorse the aims of Still Human Still Here campaign, a national coalition with over 50 members including the Red Cross, OXFAM, Crisis, Mind, Citizens Advice Bureau and Amnesty International, and to make this clear in the letter to the Home Secretary.

We are proud that over many years we have been doing our bit to create a welcoming and just Leeds free of poverty and homelessness, and we hope Leeds City Council will continue to support us in this effort and follow through on its commitment to be a City of Sanctuary.

Thank you for your consideration and your support. Thank you, Lord Mayor.  
*(Applause)*

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor James Lewis.

COUNCILLOR J LEWIS: Thank you. I move that the Deputation be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Latty.

COUNCILLOR G LATTY: I second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour? *(A vote was taken)* Thank you.  
CARRIED.

Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon.