

## **Briefing Paper – Aberdeen City Council Full Council Meeting** **Notice of Motion 10.1, 1st October 2025**

The No Recourse North East (NRNE) Partnership is a cross-sector Partnership comprised of third-sector organisations, public sector representatives, community groups, and elected officials. Established in 2014, it promotes knowledge sharing and good practice among agencies supporting those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The Partnership was created in response to inconsistent decisions by public bodies, lack of sector expertise, and safety concerns for women from out with the UK who were fleeing domestic abuse and unable to access the vital support required due to their immigration status. The Partnership aims to ensure individuals with NRPF, particularly from minority ethnic communities, who are affected by homelessness, domestic abuse or destitution, receive quality advice and support across all agencies in the North East. This includes those who are seeking asylum in the UK who have been housed in our communities.

Since the full asylum dispersal system was implemented in 2022, the NRNE Partnership has played an integral role in coordinating the strategic response across the North East of Scotland and in upskilling professionals across all sectors so that people seeking asylum can access the advice and support they require to allow them to integrate and begin to recover from the undoubted trauma they have experienced.

We were concerned to read the contents of Motion 10.1 to be debated on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025, and want to ensure that facts remain central to the debate:

- All of those housed within accommodation provided by Mears are in receipt of Asylum Support and have therefore **made valid, admissible claims for asylum**;
- People seeking asylum are not illegal migrants; **asylum is a human right** – under Article 31 of the Refugee Convention, **irregular entry is not illegal**;
- **Only 39%** of those who claimed asylum in the UK in the year up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025 **arrived via small boat**;
- **People seeking asylum are not economic migrants** – there is **no evidence** to suggest this is the case;
- **Systemic issues** within our housing, homelessness, health and education systems are longstanding; they **are not caused by the 438 people seeking asylum** who are living in our communities;
- People seeking asylum are **more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators**;
- **Local Authorities receive £1,200 per occupied bedspace** of asylum accommodation in their area to mitigate against any impact on local services;
- The **funding** used to support people seeking asylum in the UK **comes from the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget** (i.e. overseas aid) and therefore is not money that would otherwise be spent on services in the UK.

## **Key Background Information**

As acknowledged in Motion 10.1, Aberdeen has a wonderful history of welcoming and supporting those who have come to the UK under various resettlement schemes, including individuals and families from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine. Unfortunately, safe routes for seeking sanctuary in the UK are extremely limited and the **UK Government has repeatedly ignored calls to establish further safe routes** for those who are fleeing conflict or persecution. Individuals and families are therefore forced to use unsafe means to reach UK soil to seek asylum. **The arrival of people in the UK by small boat is therefore a result of deliberate UK Government policy and legislation.** The hostile environment and decades of underinvestment in the asylum system are what have led to the current circumstances.

We are deeply concerned by the actions of a minority of Aberdeen's citizens, where regular protests outside asylum accommodation have led to an increase in racism and hate speech. We are even more concerned that elected representatives of our city are fuelling this racism and hatred by perpetuating disinformation. At least 11 people have been charged in Aberdeen in connection with a hate crime in recent months, and many of our colleagues and community members of ethnic minority backgrounds have reported feeling unsafe when they leave their homes.

## **Facts About Asylum**

It is imperative to note that under Article 31 of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (aka The Refugee Convention), to which the UK is a signatory, **it is not illegal for a person seeking asylum to enter a country via irregular means.** Article 31 is clear that States shall not impose penalties or restrictions on refugees on account of their unlawful entry or presence. It is therefore incorrect and in contravention of the Refugee Convention to refer to those who have entered the UK via irregular means to claim asylum as "illegal" migrants.

**All people being provided with accommodation by the Home Office in hotels and other disused buildings in Aberdeen have made admissible claims for asylum.** This accommodation is provided as part of Asylum Support, which is available to those who have lodged a valid claim for asylum in the UK and would otherwise be homeless and destitute. As of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025, there were 106,075 individuals in receipt of Asylum Support in the UK, with 6,107 in Scotland and **only 438 in Aberdeen.** Therefore, **there are no "illegal" migrants being provided with accommodation in Aberdeen.**

Despite the rhetoric that we frequently hear from the UK Government and the media, it should be noted that in the year ending June 2025, **only 39% of those who were claiming asylum in the UK had arrived here via small boat** and a further 11% had arrived via other irregular routes.

**It is incorrect to say those in receipt of Asylum Support are economic migrants.** Not only have they all submitted valid, admissible claims for asylum, but according to the Home Office's most recent statistics, the top five nationalities of those seeking asylum are Pakistani, Afghan, Iranian, Eritrean and Bangladeshi. All five of these countries have well-documented conflicts or human rights violations, as highlighted in the relevant Country Policy and Information Notes

published by the Home Office. Individuals are left to make perilous journeys to find safety and sanctuary with an aspiration that once they have achieved this, they will then be able to support themselves and not rely on welfare. In addition, people seeking asylum are not permitted to work whilst their claim is being considered. Therefore, the statement that they are economic migrants is not only false and misleading but also perpetuates the anti-migrant and racist rhetoric which is becoming increasingly more prevalent in our city. **Wrongly labelling asylum seekers as 'economic migrants' undermines their legal protections and weakens the moral responsibility to protect them.**

### **Systemic Failures**

Whilst many of the residents of Aberdeen have legitimate concerns about the systemic issues within our housing, homelessness, education and health systems, **traumatised individuals seeking safety are not responsible for these broken systems and scapegoating them will not fix them.** These issues existed well before people seeking asylum were moved to Aberdeen in 2022.

Furthermore, Aberdeen City Council receives **£1,200 per occupied bedspace of asylum accommodation** in the Local Authority area, which, according to the Funding Instruction for Local Authorities issued by the Home Office, is specifically to address concerns raised by Local Authorities in relation to pressure on local services associated with supporting people seeking asylum.

### **Weaponisation of Violence Against Women and Girls**

More than 100 women's rights groups including [Ending Violence Against Women Coalition](#) have written a joint letter to the Prime Minister highlighting and calling for urgent action against the weaponisation of violence against women and girls by far-right groups and mainstream politicians to further a racist, anti-migrant agenda. **'This narrative sees vital conversations about violence against women and girls (VAWG) hijacked by an agenda that fuels division, harms survivors and ultimately impedes the real work of tackling the root causes of society-wide violence, to the detriment of women and girls.'** We urge Councillors not to perpetuate this misinformative weaponisation of the view that people seeking asylum are a threat to women and girls in our communities in Aberdeen.

### **Proposed Planning Enforcement Action**

We note that Motion 10.1 has moved that the council instructs the Chief Officer – Strategic Place Planning to review all permissions for buildings housing people seeking asylum and to pursue planning enforcement action where there is a potential breach. Whilst it is the Local Authority's prerogative to pursue legal action as it sees fit; this would be an expensive process at a significant cost to the public purse. **Whilst the final outcome of any legal action is unknown it is felt that such a public challenge will only serve to stoke racism and anti-migrant sentiment across our city.**

## **Our Asks**

We acknowledge the statement that was published by Councillors Allard, Yuill and Malik on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and support the intent behind it; however, we call on **all** Aberdeen City Councillors to take further and immediate action by way of the following:

- Ensure the debate on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> October is centred around facts;
- Engage directly with the residents of Aberdeen and act to counter disinformation with facts;
- Take action to ensure the safety and act in the interests of all residents of Aberdeen, regardless of race or immigration status, as per the Code of Conduct for Councillors;
- Explore how the asylum grants of £1,200 per occupied bedspace have been used in Aberdeen;
- Work with relevant Local Authority Departments to ensure transparent implementation of the New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2024;
- Do not collude in the weaponisation of violence against women and girls by far-right groups and mainstream politicians to further a racist, anti-migrant agenda.