Free Concessionary Bus Travel for Asylum Seekers – Motion as adjusted approved.

14 Bailie Carroll, seconded by Bailie Hoy, moved that:-

"Council recalls the motion as adjusted passed by Council on 11th May 2023 which acknowledged "the immense benefits which could be gained from free bus travel for people seeking asylum…and therefore resolves to support the extension of free bus travel to those seeking asylum". Council notes that Free Bus Travel is available through concessionary cards to anyone aged under 22 as well as 60 and over, regardless of Asylum status.

Council further notes an Asylum Seeker in receipt of statutory support receives £49.18 per week to cover all living costs in self-catered accommodation, or £8.86 in catered accommodation, and that 4,520 people are in receipt of support in Glasgow as of December 2023. Council recognises the findings in "The Mental Health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK" report by Mental Health UK, that "getting out of the house improved their wellbeing, but that affording public transport services was difficult", with 84% of Asylum Seekers and Refugees they surveyed saying that they had "experienced being unable to use public transport because of the cost" in Scotland.

Council notes Refugee Survival Trust's 12 week pilot in the Spring and Summer of 2023 providing 150 Asylum Seekers with Free Bus Travel, which was a springboard for the Scottish Government's plans to roll out a national pilot.

Council notes its deep disappointment in the Scottish Government's decision to reverse their pledge to provide Free Bus Travel to Asylum Seekers nationally. Council agrees to affirm its support for the rollout of Free Bus Travel through a national concessionary card scheme for Asylum Seekers aged 22-59 who are not covered by existing provision.

Council agrees with Maryhill Integration Network on how this announcement is particularly disappointing following the Scottish Government's New Scots Integration Strategy launch, where transport was identified as a key theme to further enhance integration.

Therefore, Council requests the Convener for Transport writes to the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Transport to state Council's support for the free bus travel scheme for Asylum Seekers to ask that the decision to not expand this provision nationally be reversed.

Council also asks the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Secretary of State for Transport within the UK Government to request that work is carried out to roll out a free concessionary bus card scheme for Asylum Seekers UK-wide, following the successful pilot in Glasgow."

Councillor Millar, seconded by Bailie Salih, moved as an amendment that:-

(1) at paragraph 4:

(a) after “nationally”, insert the following:

“Council regrets that this decision has been taken as part of an extremely challenging budgetary position facing the Scottish Government due to in-year cost pressures, similar to those identified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at UK Government level which have also resulted in spending constraints. Council notes that the Scottish Government, unlike the UK Government, does not have access to in-year borrowing or tax-varying powers, and that the new Labour UK Government has indicated that their forthcoming UK Budget is likely to involve significant further cuts and spending constraints, with profound impacts for Scotland’s public services and the deliverability of and timescales for some Scottish Government policy commitments.”; and

(b) after “provision” add the following:

“and to continue to make the case to both the Scottish and UK Governments to support this policy”.; and

(2) at the last paragraph after “carried out” add “and funding provided”.; and

(3) at the end add the following paragraph:

“Council acknowledges that one of the fundamental barriers to integration and financial inclusion for asylum seekers in Scotland is the Home Office’s refusal to allow asylum seekers the right to work, and further believes that the aforementioned levels of statutory support available for asylum seekers undermine the aims of creating a welcoming environment for those seeking asylum. Council therefore calls on the new Labour UK Government to extend the right to work to asylum seekers, and to review statutory support to ensure asylum seekers can live with dignity and respect, and requests that the Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the new Prime Minister to outline the Council’s position on this matter.”

Councillor O’Neill, seconded by Bailie Murray, moved as an amendment that:-

(1) at paragraph 3 insert the following at the start:

“Council notes the campaign which was launched by the VOICES Network and Paul Sweeney MSP in 2021 which has since gained broad support across the Scottish Parliament, third sector and public bodies as well as the”.

to read as follows:

“Council notes….. as well as the Refugee Survival Trust's 12-week pilot in the Spring and Summer of 2023 providing 150 Asylum Seekers with Free Bus Travel, which was a springboard for the Scottish Government's plans to roll out a national pilot.”;

(2) after paragraph 3 insert the following paragraph:

"Council re-iterates its belief that granting concessionary bus travel to asylum seekers is not just about fairness but vital to ensure that all members of our community can fully participate in society. Council recognises the concerns associated around the cost of implementing such a policy at a time when public finances are under such pressure but believes the cost of the ongoing exclusion and isolation associated with inaction are far higher.";

(3) at paragraph 4 after the first sentence insert the following:

"Council recognises this as the latest in a series of regressive policy decisions since the collapse of the Bute House Agreement.";

(4) at the end of paragraph 5 insert the following:

"Council also agrees with the letter from Mark Ruskell MSP and Paul Sweeney MSP highlighting the poor communication with stakeholders who are some of the most vulnerable people in our society."; and

(5) before the last paragraph insert the following paragraph:

"Council believes that is vital to reduce the long periods of time that people seeking asylum spend awaiting determinations of their application and re-iterates its call that applicants should have the right to work. Council calls on the UK and Scottish Governments to work constructively with local authorities to address this and other issues to break away from the failed legacy of the previous Conservative Government."

Bailie Carroll, with the agreement of his seconder, accepted the amendments by Councillor Millar and Councillor O'Neill resulting in the following adjusted motion:-

"Council recalls the motion as adjusted passed by Council on 11 May 2023 which acknowledged "*the immense benefits which could be gained from free bus travel for people seeking asylum…and therefore resolves to support the extension of free bus travel to those seeking asylum*". Council notes that Free Bus Travel is available through concessionary cards to anyone aged under 22 as well as 60 and over, regardless of Asylum status.

Council further notes an Asylum Seeker in receipt of statutory support receives £49.18 per week to cover all living costs in self-catered accommodation, or £8.86 in catered accommodation, and that 4,520 people are in receipt of support in Glasgow as of December 2023. Council recognises the findings in "*The Mental Health of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the UK*" report by Mental Health UK, that "*getting out of the house improved their wellbeing, but that affording public transport services was difficult*", with 84% of Asylum Seekers and Refugees they surveyed saying that they had "*experienced being unable to use public transport because of the cost*" in Scotland.

Council notes the campaign which was launched by the VOICES Network in 2021 which has since gained broad support across the Scottish Parliament, third sector and public bodies as well as the Refugee Survival Trust's 12 week pilot in the Spring and Summer of 2023 providing 150 Asylum Seekers with Free Bus Travel, which was a springboard for the Scottish Government's plans to roll out a national pilot.

Council reiterates its belief that granting concessionary bus travel to asylum seekers is not just about fairness but vital to ensure that all members of our community can fully participate in society. Council recognises the concerns associated around the cost of implementing such a policy at a time when public finances are under such pressure but believes the cost of the ongoing exclusion and isolation associated with inaction are far higher. Council notes the extremely challenging budgetary position facing the Scottish Government due to in-year cost pressures, similar to those identified by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at UK Government level.

Council notes its deep disappointment in the Scottish Government's decision to reverse their pledge to provide Free Bus Travel to Asylum Seekers nationally. Council agrees to affirm its support for the rollout of Free Bus Travel through a national concessionary card scheme for Asylum Seekers aged 22-59 who are not covered by existing provision and to continue to make the case to both the Scottish and UK Governments to support this policy

Council agrees with Maryhill Integration Network on how this announcement is particularly disappointing following the Scottish Government's New Scots Integration Strategy launch, where transport was identified as a key theme to further enhance integration. Council also highlights the poor communication with stakeholders and those seeking asylum who are some of the most vulnerable people in our society, of this policy's scrapping being announced during the Strategy Launch.

Therefore, Council requests the Convener for Transport writes to the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Transport to state Council's support for the free bus travel scheme for Asylum Seekers to ask that the decision to not expand this provision nationally be reversed.

Council also asks the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Secretary of State for Transport within the UK Government to request that work is carried out and funding provided to roll out a free concessionary bus card scheme for Asylum Seekers UK-wide, following the successful pilot in Glasgow.

Council acknowledges that one of the fundamental barriers to integration and financial inclusion for asylum seekers in Scotland is the Home Office's refusal to allow asylum seekers the right to work, and further believes that the aforementioned levels of statutory support available for asylum seekers undermine the aims of creating a welcoming environment for those seeking asylum. Council believes that is vital to reduce the long periods of time that people seeking asylum spend awaiting determinations of their application and reiterates its call that

applicants should have the right to work. Council therefore calls on the new Labour UK Government to extend the right to work to asylum seekers, and to review statutory support to ensure asylum seekers can live with dignity and respect, and requests that the Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the new Prime Minister to outline the Council's position on this matter. Council calls on the UK and Scottish Governments to work constructively with local authorities to address this and other issues to break away from the failed legacy of the previous Conservative Government."

The motion as adjusted was approved unanimously.

Adjournment.

15 In terms of Standing Order No 17, the Council agreed to adjourn the meeting at 1545 hours until 1605 hours.

Resumption of meeting.

16 The meeting resumed at 1605 hours and the sederunt was taken as follows:-

Present: The Depute Lord Provost, Christy Mearns (Chair).

SAQIB AHMED
SUSAN AITKEN
BLAIR ANDERSON
KEN ANDREW
ALEXANDER BELIC
RICHARD BELL
DECLAN BLENCH
EVA BOLANDER
ABDUL BOSTANI
PHILIP BRAAT
JILL BROWN
HOLLY BRUCE
BILL BUTLER
GRAHAM CAMPBELL
CHRISTINA CANNON
PAUL CAREY
JOHN CARSON
ANTHONY CARROLL
ALLAN CASEY
ANNETTE CHRISTIE
CHRIS CUNNINGHAM
STEPHEN CURRAN
JOHN DALY
AUDREY DEMPSEY
STEPHEN DOCHERTY
STEPHEN DORNAN
SEAN FERGUSON
ZEN GHANI
WILLIAM GRAHAM
SHARON GREER
GREG HEPBURN
FIONA HIGGINS
SEONAD HOY
RASHID HUSSAIN
FYEZA IKHLAQ
EUNIS JASSEMI
ANN JENKINS
LILITH JOHNSTONE
RUAIRI KELLY
ALEX KERR
THOMAS KERR
KEVIN LALLEY
PAUL LEINSTER
FRANK McAVEETY
PAUL MCCABE
ELAINE McDOUGALL
JACQUELINE McLAREN
KENNY McLEAN
NORMAN MacLEOD
ELAINE McSPORRAN
ANNE McTAGGART
ANGUS MILLAR
MALCOLM MITCHELL
JON MOLYNEUX
ROBERT MOONEY
MARGARET MORGAN
EVA MURRAY
CECILIA O'LONE
KEIRAN O'NEILL
JILL PIDGEON
LINDA PIKE
HANIF RAJA
THOMAS RANNACHAN
GEORGE REDMOND
LANA REID-MCCONNELL
ROZA SALIH
FRANNY SCALLY
JAMES SCANLON
SORYIA SIDDIQUE
KIERAN TURNER
CATHERINE VALLIS
MARTHA WARDROP
ALEX WILSON

Apologies: Imran Alam, Laura Doherty, Elaine Gallagher, Dan Hutchison, Matt Kerr and Leòdhas Massie.

Attending: M Millar, Director of Legal and Administration; S Millar, Chief Executive; D Hutchison, Executive Director of Education Services; M Booth, Executive Director of Finance; J Kerr, Interim Chief Officer, Glasgow City Health and Social Care Partnership; and C Edgar, Director of Communication and Corporate Governance.