



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

## LD4SOS APRIL/MAY NEWSLETTER

This newsletter has been a bit delayed because we wanted to cover the General Election and we won't be doing another one until after 8 June. Apologies for lack of pictures but we just have not had the time.

### HELP FOR CANDIDATES AND LOCAL PARTIES/GROUPS ON ASYLUM ISSUES DURING THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

On 8 June the country will be going to the polls again to vote in a new government. BREXIT – hard or soft - and the economy will undoubtedly be debated time and time again across the country. Politicians can shy away from discussing asylum issues. But we must use the opportunity to highlight the desperate plight of asylum seekers and refugees – both those trying to get reach sanctuary in the UK, and those already here – and hold all the political parties to account for their policies.

Do talk or write to your candidates about the major problems facing refugees and asylum seekers and challenge them on what they do about it if elected. Do also ask your candidates of all Parties about the hatred which is being stirred up against asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants generally, with any local examples you have. Migration controls have become a key part of the BREXIT negotiations. Ask them how the political parties can ensure that the positive contribution that asylum seekers make to the UK is celebrated in such a febrile environment.

We will be sending out our Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary manifesto (which is based on existing party policy so it can be used and quoted from) very soon. It will be available on our website too. As well as our Manifesto you can find [other useful documents](#) including [20 Top Facts](#) on our website. If you need any more information which you cannot find on the website do contact Margaret Lally at [Margaret.lally1@btinternet.com](mailto:Margaret.lally1@btinternet.com) who may be able to provide some assistance.

### PRO-REFUGEE ALLIANCE

The Pro-Refugee Alliance is a cross-party campaign aiming to put refugee's rights back on the political agenda and to give a voice to the voiceless in this General Election. It will be supporting candidates who pledge to restart the transfer of unaccompanied refugee children under the Dubs scheme. It will be campaigning against the MPs who have consistently voted against saving refugee children and have very small majorities. More information [here](#)

The target list [is here](#)

Campaign dates [are here](#).

### STOP SHARING MEDICAL INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

Doctors of the World has just launched its #StopSharing campaign calling on the UK government to stop using NHS patients' personal information to track down migrants. The deal struck in January between the Home Office and NHS Digital gives the Home Office easier access to migrant patients' information, such as addresses, and allows them to track down, arrest and deport undocumented migrants. Patient confidentiality is essential for NHS staff to be able to do their job – and yet they have not been consulted about this deal, with concerns raised by medical organisations ignored.

Support the #StopSharing campaign by sharing the [petition](#) with your networks and taking action on social media.

You can also help promote the "[Safe Surgeries](#)" toolkit for healthcare professionals which gives GP practices concrete ways to defy the data-sharing deal by keeping their patients' addresses off NHS records, including using the GP practice address as c/o address. Resources to promote the campaign are here [DotW website](#).

## **LIBERAL DEMOCRAT IMMIGRATION & IDENTITY POLICY WORKING GROUP**

In February 2017 the Party established a Policy Working Group on Immigration & Identity. The Group has now been put on hold due to the forthcoming General Election and will not meet again until after June. Its membership includes Margaret Lally who is a Council member of LDSOS. The Group will build on existing Party policy and respond to the implications of the vote to leave the EU. It has a wide remit which includes:

- Considering the result of the EU referendum and how best to challenge the perceptions of and attitudes towards immigration that helped bring about that result.
- The effect of immigration – both positive and negative on the UK
- The different types of immigration into the UK and the future of EU immigration to the UK
- The fitness of purpose of government agencies
- Discrimination & hate crime against immigrants and how best to protect immigrants from abuse and exploitation
- The impact of migration on community relations and how best to ensure social cohesion in communities with high levels of immigration
- The role of community identity for different generations of immigrants
- How best to protect asylum seekers and refugees, particularly with regards to the ongoing refugee crisis

The Group is planning to take evidence and consult widely both within and outside the Party. It intended to have consultative sessions at the autumn conference and present a document at the spring conference in 2018 but this timetable will now need to be reviewed. Full details can be found on <http://www.libdems.org.uk/immigrationpolicy>

## **UPDATE ON CALAIS AND ACTION ON DUNKIRK CAMP FOLLOWING FIRE**

### **LATEST FROM CALAIS**

Living conditions at Calais [are reported to be](#) far worse, with the French authorities making life as difficult as possible for the 400 or so refugees that are there, including around 150 unaccompanied children. People are literally living on streets with no sanitation and health is bad. There are regular visits from police confiscating such belongings such as sleeping bags, and disrupting food aid.

A report released by the [Refugee Rights Data Project](#) reveals severe problems for refugee children in the Calais area six-months after the makeshift camps' demolition.

Six months after the demolition of the Calais camp, it's clear that many problems remain unsolved. The findings show up how there is a big child protection failure to protect the young people from exploitation; there has been violence from those meant to protect them – the police. Many have been denied the chance to join their family under the Dublin Regulation because they are either waiting for a decision or not yet had a chance to apply to join their family under this Regulation. In sum, the report concludes "British and French governments have an urgent role to play in the development of this humanitarian crisis, six months on from the demolition of the camp."

**Reminder** – we recently asked members to look at the joint statement from Help Refugees, Safe Passage, Refugee Youth Service, and Dunkirk Legal Centre which set out the distress and horror caused by the fire, and makes suggestions about what you can do. [You can find it here](#)

An updates sheet of possible actions for you to take, with a draft letter to Amber Rudd (still in office until Election Day!) is [on our website](#). It needs adapting for the Dunkirk situation.

Please respond with action and also donations. Share with others too.

## **REFUGEES WELCOME HERE?**

We welcomed the report of the All Party Parliamentary Group “Refugees Welcome Here?” which rightly questions the difference in the support provided to refugees depending on how they got here. <http://libdemfocus.co.uk/ld4sos/archives/1009> For us the crucial issue is that the UK welcomes all those who are seeking sanctuary here. We support the recommendations to appoint a Minister for Refugees and to devise a National Refugee Integration Strategy in cooperation with members of civil society, faith groups, local authorities and officials from the relevant Government departments. We also welcomed the recommendation to extend the 28 day period that someone who is granted refugee status has to find somewhere to live and a job and any benefits to 50 days to avoid destitution and homeless

Integration is what refugees, however they arrive here, want. The UK needs to be encouraging better and more humane ways of Family Reunification, providing refugees with a national insurance number as soon as possible as well increasing provision of ESOL and support for job search. All of this complements LD4SOS’ call for those seeking sanctuary to be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion and for them to be able to contribute to life in the UK as they so much want to be able to do.

## **COUNCILS & THE DUBS AMENDMENT**

We were all desperately disappointed that the Dubs scheme has effectively been closed down. Citizens UK are still fighting on this and are supporting Help Refugees to take the Home Office to court in June 2017 (still happening, even with the General Election due) over the way they have failed to properly implement the Dubs scheme. They have contacted LD4SOS saying that the main thing they need help on is getting witness statements from a variety of local councils which will highlight how the Dubs consultation process was carried out in their areas.

Some of you will have developed good relationships with your local Councils on this issue. Are you able to ask them to give a statement to the lawyers for the case? If so please get in touch with [Hannah.gretton@citizensuk.org](mailto:Hannah.gretton@citizensuk.org), urgently in the next week. If possible can you put the council directly in contact with the lawyers, Rosa at [rcurling@leighday.co.uk](mailto:rcurling@leighday.co.uk) and Lucy at [Lcadd@leighday.co.uk](mailto:Lcadd@leighday.co.uk). They will be able to explain properly what is needed, and will be able to answer questions.

## **SOME GOOD NEWS**

### **GOVERNMENT FINALLY RECOGNISES RESETTLED SYRIANS AS REFUGEES**

Up until now Syrian refugees who had been resettled in the UK were given a special form of leave to remain called humanitarian protection. This meant that they did not have the same rights as people with refugee status – presumably because it was assumed that the war in Syria would soon end.

On 22 March, following campaigning by refugee agencies, the Home Office announced that Syrian refugees who are being resettled in the UK will now be granted refugee status, which will enable them to start to live a more normal life and integrate into British life e.g. travel more easily to visit

relatives in other European countries, being eligible for student finance so they could access university, which leads to those we have welcomed here being able to live here in peace and contribute positively to British life.

## **HELP FOR REFUGEES ACCESSING FURTHER EDUCATION**

### **Birkbeck Offers Scholarships for Asylum Seekers**

Birkbeck University of London has been in contact with us to say that, as from now, they are offering 20 fully funded scholarships for asylum seekers covering the costs of an undergraduate or postgraduate certificate at this university. This initiative is part of their Compass Project. These scholarships are intended to help students who are unable to access student finance, to achieve a valuable qualification, providing a platform for further university study.

The University is looking to develop links with community organisations to maximise opportunities for individuals who have sought sanctuary in the UK. Could LD4SOS members please circulate this information to any groups they are in contact with. You can contact Naureen Abubacker yourselves you have any questions about the fund and would like to discuss more about working together to improve and support access to university for asylum seekers. Naureen can be contacted via [thecompassproject@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:thecompassproject@bbk.ac.uk)

**Kings College London is offering 10 free scholarships for its summer school, details here,** <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/assets/PDF/summer-school/UNHCR-Scholarships.pdf?platform=hootsuite>

### **Bath University Crowdfunding**

<http://www.bathecho.co.uk/news/education/university-bath-students-staff-celebrate-success-welcoming-refugees-72084/>

Students and staff at Bath University recently surpassed their target of £5000 to fund university scholarships for refugees in less than months with over £6000 raised so far. The campaign to welcome refugees to university started in September 2015 when over 1100 students signed an open letter supporting scholarships. Student members of Amnesty and staff of the university and college union and UNISON started crowdfunding in January in response to financial barriers that exclude refugees from university. Bath Spa University and the universities of Bristol Cardiff and Exeter are among 50 across the country to already support refugees through full or partial scholarships. If you are involved in further education (as a student or member of staff) could you encourage your institution to become part of this campaign??