



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

End to the Azure card in name only May 2017

The new system, now being rolled out, where all asylum seekers will be issued with an “ASPEN CARD” was going to make a lot of improvements for all, and it was expected that all would be able to draw out cash they are entitled to, to spend where they needed. BUT it has just been clarified by the Home Office that asylum seekers in receipt of Section 4 will still not be able to draw cash.

WHAT IS THE AZURE CARD?

The Azure card is a payment card issued to refused asylum seekers who are destitute and have agreed to return to their country of origin but who cannot return immediately due to circumstances beyond their control. The card was designed to provide short-term support. However, because people who cannot be returned also lack the right to work, many have found themselves trapped in a state of perpetual destitution.

Azure Card Features include, only to be used in 14 shops, which do not include popular discount stores, street markets, most charity shops, or ethnic food stores; it cannot be used for costs of transport, haircuts or other items that cannot be purchased in a designated shop. Also those on Section 4 receive less income than those on Section 95.

WHAT IS THE ASPEN CARD?

The Aspen Card is a pre-paid debit card that is “chip and pin”. It should make life easier for asylum seekers and be an improvement on old systems.

Aspen Card features include, allowing money in the account to be carried over if not needed in one week; can be used for those who used to get cash to draw it anywhere with a cashpoint and not have to travel to a designated post office. It can be used anywhere that has a “visa” sign at the cash desk so any balance remaining after cash has been withdrawn can be used in any retail outlet where Visa debit cards are accepted. It does not provide a credit facility

BUT

Asylum seekers on Section 4 will not be able to draw out cash and can only use their card at the specified stores, as above. So the Aspen card is no different from the Azure card for these people.

Lord Roberts in a debate in the House of Lords in March 2015 said:

“The Azure card, which replaced an outmoded and discriminatory voucher system, has solved none of the problems it was designed to address. It has caused untold suffering to those forced to live under its draconian rules, harmed the very people it was supposed to protect and left the most vulnerable without food, and without hope.

The humane thing to do would be to abolish the card and provide people with the support they need and the right to work. We must provide people with a path out of poverty – not condemn them to destitution.” He ended “put an end to an inhumane system that has no place in a civilised society. Abolish the Azure card now.”

Liberal Democrats have long called for the end to the Azure Card, and it is Liberal Democrat Policy to abolish the Azure Card and Section 4 and provide all asylum support under section 95. It is also Liberal Democrat Policy that all asylum seekers who can, are expected to work after being in the UK for more than 6 months.