



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

OCTOBER 2018 LD4SOS NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 18 LD4SOS NEWSLETTER

CONFERENCE FEEDBACK.

Well it was busy! The Migration policy motion, an AGM, a fringe meeting, and our stall all took up time and energy, but it was well worth it.

We had a well-stocked stall, with not only a lot of information leaflets for people, but a lot of people stopped by to ask questions or have a chat about work they were doing in their area. We had several “distinguished visitors”. Here is Catherine Bearder with one of our leaflets.



Our AGM was very lively, being the night before the Policy Motion debate, and we had a great line up of speakers, Ed Davey, Tim Farron, and Shas Sheehan. We also managed to get through the mechanics of the AGM, approving accounts, and a new committee has been agreed.

The fringe meeting was addressed by Tim Farron, Jon Featonby from British Red Cross, and our own Ruvy Ziegler on the subject of the need for Refugee Family Reunion. You can see the write up [here](#).



The Policy Motion, F16, [‘A Fair Deal for Everyone: Prosperity and Dignity in Migration’](#) was both controversial and interesting, the result is that the Liberal Democrats have now by far the most progressive asylum policy, with concrete targets, than any UK political party.

You can see a write up of the debate [here](#).

So what are those policies? They are posted on our website as [a document here](#), but as so important to our work, are adding them into this newsletter, below. Please note that the “new policies document” includes just the new ones.

We have also rewritten several information leaflets, and added some new ones, so that all are up to date. The following are now posted on our website, under “documents” – Detention, Right to Work, Decision Making, ‘Hostile Environment’, When the Decision is Made, Life as an Asylum Seeker, and Refugees. They are there to be used (!) please feel free to download, share, print, and lobby with to raise awareness and campaign. They may change when we have more time to edit, so come back to us with any views. [LINK TO WEBSITE](#)

Policies adopted at the September 2018 Conference

relating to seekers of sanctuary

A SAFE AND WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

- We will **end the practice of the “hostile environment”** approach which includes everything from multiple expensive and inhumane immigration detention centres to making civil society the frontline of immigration control, resulting in mistakes and unfairness on an industrial scale.

- **Ensure that victims of trafficking are supported** so that they can give evidence against their traffickers and never be returned against their will to their country of origin where their traffickers would have access to them all over again.
- Retain, alongside refugee status, humanitarian protection status, and reiterate our commitment to the principle of *non-refoulement* as applied in international and European human rights law.

DECISION MAKING

- Review and reform all aspects of current asylum rules and operations that offend basic measures of fairness and justice. We particularly seek to **change the culture of disbelief that affects all people applying for asylum.**
- **Establish a new dedicated unit for asylum applications**, independent of central Government, to improve speed and quality of decision-making, ensuring better decisions, right the first time. The new unit would work with local authorities on dispersal and settlement issues.
- Take political influence out of decision-making on applications for visas and sanctuary.
- **Provide better training for staff** particularly those who deal directly with more vulnerable groups such as victims of torture or trafficking, mentally ill people, pregnant women, children and LGBT+ people.
- **Review and reform all aspects of current asylum rules and operations**, with an initial focus on how the rules affect LGBT+ applicants, child-led family reunification applications and those who fled because of their religious or non-religious beliefs, or who are at risk if returned because they have since converted to another faith or belief. Never, in any circumstances, refuse an LGBT+ applicant on the basis that they could be discreet. Have a presumption in favour of family reunification except in those rare cases where it is not in the interests of the child.

At the end of all the processes, when people have been dealt with justly, fairly, and with compassion, and have to be removed from the country, we will only do so with humanity, and following the National Independent Commission on Enforced Removals recommendations on how removals should take place, seeking to keep families together, allow people to exhaust appeals in-country and secure safe destinations for people to go to.

DETENTION

We have reaffirmed our pledge to **end indefinite detention with a maximum time limit of 28 days.**

- A new policy of **detention as last resort**, using community alternatives to detention such as more case-work in the community, thus allowing the closure of eight of the UK's ten immigration detention centres.
- **No detention for vulnerable people**, such as pregnant women and those who have mental health problems or been subject to torture, and that no one is detained more than 72 hours without judicial oversight.

BEING PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

- **Increase timescale for asylum seekers to find accommodation from 28 to 60 days** after receiving a decision and **remove the time limit entirely for vulnerable people.**
- **Provide free basic English lessons to any seeker of sanctuary.** We would start these lessons at the earliest opportunity, so that they would be able to integrate and work in the UK as soon as possible.
- **Endorse *The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill.***

- **Support restoring the arrangements for legal aid** for seekers of sanctuary that existed before *The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012*.
- The level of support for asylum seekers should be at the same level for all, and all should be able to use the Aspen Card to withdraw cash.
- **All asylum seekers should be granted the right to work**, if they wish, 3 months after applying for asylum. The new unit would be required to assist the asylum seeker exercise this option through facilitating access to training and accreditation of relevant qualifications. Asylum seekers able to work would be required to do so 6 months after applying for asylum. Safeguards will be in place to ensure that no one is compelled to work who is unable to do so. It would give them dignity, ability to use their skills, and be better able to find a job when given the right to remain.
- All future government-tendered contracts for asylum-seekers' housing should be rewritten to ensure that a local authority or group of local authorities can compete for them; that housing conditions which compromise human dignity, will be grounds for termination; that existing specific laws on rental housing standards will be fully applicable.
- **We would abolish all forced bedroom sharing of unrelated adults**. It is completely wrong that an asylum seeker has no place for privacy. Also, it is wrong that those with no shared language, country, culture, or faith share bedroom space.

REFUGEES

- **Offer safe and legal routes to the UK for at least 10,000 refugees each year** by expanding the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, both to help a greater number of people from that region and to cover other conflict zones such as Myanmar.
- Provide an effective mechanism to implement in full Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 that commits the UK to welcoming unaccompanied refugee children, this scheme to be expanded **to welcome 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children over a period of 10 years**.

OTHER NEWS

Conference also passionately debated a motion on **Restoring the [Rights of the Windrush Generation](#), A shake up needed.**

Tim Farron [spoke on](#) taking decision making away from the Home Office in Politics Home.

The Home Office found to be illegal. It is quite sickening to have found out via the courts how the Home Office have been deliberately withholding reasons for stopping these refugee kids coming to the UK. First, they said it would take too long to give written reasons, then it came out that "Home Office had internally decided not to convey fuller reasons for fear that children refused would bring legal challenges." Thus, denying these very vulnerable children, in terrible circumstances, their fundamental rights. It should not have taken a court case to do this, and thank you to Help Refugees for doing so.

This is what Ed Davey [has had to say](#).

Sunderland scandal: Liberal Democrat Councillors in Sunderland are rightly angry at the actions of their Labour MP, Julie Elliott, and the Labour Council over asylum seekers coming there. The Council have said that they do not want any more asylum seekers to be housed there – but didn't tell the Lib Dem Group, and won't let them see the letter sent. Pandering to right wing propaganda and lies helps nobody, and we are thankful the Lib Dem Councillors are standing up for the asylum seekers, even though it is not electorally popular. More detail in [this Guardian article](#).

Layla Moran visited **Campsfield Detention Centre**, and spoke out on ending indefinite detention, with a massive reduction in the number of detention centres, which would include Campsfield. [You can read more here.](#)



The organisation “Seeking Sanctuary” have sent us [their newsletter](#), which has a lot of news, although not good news, of the awful issues affecting refugees arriving in Europe. On our own shores, there is this disturbing report. *“Attempts to reach the UK are now being made from many ports and beaches along the Channel TV images have been shown from Ouistreham, near Caen, which has ferry and catamaran links to Portsmouth. We are concerned to hear that the Portsmouth Red Cross has spotted people illegally being refused entry by UK officials and being sent directly back to France, rather than taken into custody for processing by the immigration service.”*

New supporters scheme: There has been a lot about the new supporter scheme, and we wondered if it would be open to refugees without British Citizenship, asylum seekers, and refused asylum seekers. The answer is YES, so there may be people you know that are interested?

Also don't forget that refugees with leave to remain who are from commonwealth countries can go onto the electoral register and vote, even if they are not yet British Citizens.

NACCOM Annual Survey on Tackling Destitution

NACCOM (the No Accommodation Network) has just released their annual report highlighting key developments across their membership in working towards their vision of ending destitution amongst people seeking asylum, refugees and migrants with no recourse to public funds living in the UK. Some of the key findings include:

- 3,471 people were accommodated across the network in 2017-18.
- This includes 1,074 people who had been refused asylum, 212 other migrants with NRPF and 1,097 people who had been granted refugee status.
- Of those who were refused asylum and were known to move on from members' services in the year, 346 people (69% of those who were known to move on) went on to access statutory support, asylum accommodation or some form of leave to remain.
- Of the 1,097 refugees accommodated, at least 37% (401) were not yet in receipt of benefits or employment when they came to members' services.
- An estimated 1,641 destitute people had to be turned away by members in the twelve-month period because of a lack of accommodation to offer.
- An estimated 364,173 nights of accommodation were provided across the twelve-month period.

NACCOM has also released a video on Pathways out of Destitution ([available here](#)) and Hazel Williams' article for the Huffington Post on how lasting change can be achieved to prevent migrant homelessness is [here](#). Partners are encouraged to share on social media using [@NACCOMNetwork](#) and #EndDestitution.