



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

HOSTILE 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.

We believe that Liberal Democrats should continue to champion migration policies that benefit the United Kingdom, treat migrants and seekers of sanctuary with dignity and courtesy and address the issues which affect social cohesion, including the prevalence of low wages and the shortage of affordable homes. Our goal should be a positive, liberal consensus on immigration, through a generally acceptable and fully enforced policy meeting international standards, which will allow families to be reunited, students to study here, those with skills to offer to work here, and seekers of sanctuary to be protected and integrated.

We need better, fairer policies and to rebuild people’s trust in the system. This requires us to propose workable solutions to the very real social, infrastructure, and financial problems caused by economic change, government indifference, and underfunding, which are currently being widely blamed on immigration and on immigrants.

In practice, “hostile environment” policies have included checks on the immigration status of an individual by employers, landlords, banks, the NHS and councils, and have involved removing all access to benefits, housing, healthcare, education and employment. While employment checks make sense and need not unduly inconvenience employers, using hospitals and schools as tools in the immigration system have the potential to lead to public health emergencies and unfairly criminalise children.

This outrageous situation that we have seen, in the aftermath of the Windrush Scandal must be radically overturned. There is also an impact on everyone who either is a migrant or looks like they might be one. Whilst the new Home Secretary has moved to rebrand these policies as aiming for a “compliant environment”, until there is significant change in policy, legislation and practice, it is only a rebranding exercise.

The Liberal Democrats are totally opposed to the “Hostile Environment” and the culture of disbelief it has created.

Many of the policy changes we will implement, such as removing the Home Office’s role in setting policies in respect of migration and refugees and processing applications, are intended to contribute to eradicating that environment and changing the culture.

Specifically as part of ending the hostile environment Liberal Democrats will

- abolish the net migration target
- abolish the hostile environment policy and using civil society as border guards.
- develop a new partnership with UK universities and colleges, including a new Student & College Compliance and Liaison Team in the Dfe, aimed at reducing bureaucracy and costs for the sector and improve compliance with the rules
- Create new fairer employer checks that will involve employers checking employment status of workers with Immigration Enforcement and an assumption of a right to work until they direct otherwise. We will ensure that any demands on people to produce paperwork are proportionate, so that nobody is penalised unfairly for having kept less than meticulous records.
- Drastically reduce the immigration detention estate by ending indefinite detention with a maximum time limit for detention of 28 days; No detention longer than 72 hours without judicial oversight; not detaining vulnerable people, and more casework in the community. (As described in our detention information sheet.