



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

QUESTIONS TO LIB DEM LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES

- 1. How would you expect your parliamentary party to hold the Home Office to account and end bad decision making? In what ways would you make things better for asylum seekers and refugees living in Britain? How would you end the “hostile environment”?**

Jo. The ‘hostile environment’ created under the Conservatives runs contrary to the very proud traditions the UK has as a liberal, open and welcoming place. I believe that many parliamentarians in all parties share our values on this issue and I would work with them to reverse hostile environment practices such as the right to rent checks and the practice of ‘deport first, appeal later’. But, it is not simply good enough to end the hostile environment - this is not just about tolerance, but about actively creating an environment that is welcoming and compassionate. That is why as leader I would push for the right for asylum seekers to work whilst they wait for a decision on their claim from the Home Office. I would also restore English language provisions so that asylum seekers and refugees alike can be empowered to participate in their new communities.

Bad decision making in the Home Office is rife - with too many applications being overturned on appeal. The Home Office need to get better at getting the decision right first time round. That process also must happen at speed and with dignity for the individual concerned. I firmly believe that the Home Office’s culture does not allow this. That is why as Leader I would campaign for a new dedicated unit for asylum applications - with well trained staff, to improve the speed and quality of decision-making. The party, thanks also to the tireless work of this group, have continually sought to hold the Home Office to account. As Leader I would use all the tools available to me to do this from FOIs showing the financial waste of bad first-time decision making to meeting with victims of the Home Office’s bad practices to build the human-case for change.

Ed. To hold the HO to account properly, our current practice of having 2 spokespeople is a good idea - Tim Farron focusing on refugees and asylum seekers, and myself/the Home Affairs Spokesperson on all other matters. While it is highly unusual to have 2 MPs on one department - especially when the parliamentary party is so small - it shows our commitment, and is a strong signal of how important this issue is to the party.

One additional action we could take would be to combine better with each other, over examples from casework. I suspect I have the largest casework load of any current LibDem MP, and I and my team are chasing the HO on bad decision-making on almost a daily basis. We could try and use these real-life examples we have - with appropriate permissions - to highlight better the total incompetence and unfairness in so many of the HO decision processes.

To make things better for asylum seekers and refugees requires a whole package of measures - here are just three examples. First, they should be allowed to work 3 months after arriving in the UK - and all other existing restrictions on work should be removed. Second, the appalling housing conditions many refugees endure must be addressed, along the lines of our party policy and the ideas of LD4SoS - from enabling local authorities to combine to provide the accommodation, and not just the private contractors, to enabling community groups to be paid for providing accommodation. There must be an end to forced bedroom sharing - with much better provision of basics from blankets to cooking equipment. Third, we must ensure early access to good healthcare, as well as education for children and English lessons, where necessary, for asylum seekers and refugees. But there is a long list!!

To end the hostile environment, the first measure is to drop the main target and all other targets for "limiting" immigration, as these drive a hostile attitude and approach. Then the many rules and practices that surround the hostile environment must be dismantled - from the landlord checks to the bank checks, from the school checks to the police. We must move away from the Government involving

civil society in its immigration control, as this creates suspicion and hostility, and makes refugees fearful and can affect their mental health. But we must do far more - including stripping the Home Office of many powers - giving more involvement to other departments as appropriate, e.g. work permits to the Business Department. I don't believe we will end the hostile environment culture unless and until the Home Office's own culture is fixed, and the quickest way is to remove the Home Office from large parts of the policy work and its implementation.

2. What key principles guide you when tackling issues unpopular in the media? 'Anti-migrant rhetoric is at an alarming high, how will you challenge negative stereotypes of refugees and asylum seekers from other politicians and in the media'.

Ed. Changing attitudes to immigration will take time and require courage and determination. But we must do it - as part of tackling the causes of Brexit, the nastiness in politics and the divisions. For far too long, Governments have appeased the right wing press on immigration, and just fed their prejudice and bile. Appeasement hasn't worked - and has led to the shocking rise in far right activity. We have to take these people on directly - in argument, in the language we use and in providing evidence of the huge benefits of immigration.

There are so many cases of successful immigrants and refugees to our country - in sports, in business etc - that we can show case them - as long as we also show case how immigration has been essential to the day-to-day living in the UK -from the NHS to social care. Attitudes to immigration have actually softened in the last 3 years - partly because Brexit has shown the benefits of immigration, with people feeling passionately in favour of the 3 million EU citizens here, and partly because the shocking hostile environment has been exposed by scandals like Windrush.

One indirect way to reduce the tensions around immigration is to tackle inequality across the UK too - whether it's access to housing or well-paid employment. In good times and in more equal societies, when everyone shares in prosperity, immigration tensions can be eased - though we should be aware they may not go away totally, as we have even seen in some Scandinavian countries.

Jo. *I have met so many inspiring refugees and asylum seekers, including young people who have made the UK their home. They are contributing to our communities and are wonderful ambassadors for Britain. It is these human stories that I would employ in the media. All too often we lose sight of the people behind the statistics.*

I have really strong media cut through and I am not afraid of challenging those who have hateful views, nor would I hesitate in correcting those interviewing me when they repeat statistics straight out of the Daily Mail. It is all of our responsibility to challenge this type of prejudice wherever we see it. I have always done this whether in the media or in conversations I have on the doorstep with those who disagree with the Liberal Democrats on the issue of immigration. As your Leader I would be unashamedly pro-immigration and pro the UK doing its bit to tackle the ongoing refugee crisis.

3. what steps will you take as party leader to ensure the UK is fulfilling its obligations to resettle refugees, in particular ensuring the UK fulfils its promise to take in child refugees under the Dubs amendment ?

Jo. *I first have to say how proud I am of Tim Farron who put the refugee crisis at the heart of his leadership. It is thanks to him and you that the Dubs amendment passed and it fills me with sadness and horror that the Conservative Government continues to drag its feet on fulfilling their commitment to resettle refugees. As Leader I would continue to work with him to drive the full implementation of Section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 welcoming unaccompanied refugee children, expanding the commitment to 10,000 children over the next 10 years. As party leader I would go further and campaign to offer more safe and legal routes by expanding the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to cover other areas of conflict.*

Again, I think it is so important that the Liberal Democrats lead this fight as we have done in the past, but that we work with others who share our values and our commitment to this issue. I have a strong track-record of working with people from across different parties and in the House of Lords to drive change for example on the People's Vote campaign. We cannot win this alone and I am the Leader to build those relationships and ensure that the Liberal Democrats are at the heart of these campaigns for change.

Ed. I will write to the Prime Minister. I will table motions. I will ask questions. I will work with the team in Parliament and in the party to raise the profile. Tim Farron as spokesperson on refugees has actually been doing an amazing job, and I have chipped in to support him. But I'm sure a proactive Leader who understands the issue can assist.

4. What will be your key messages on immigration and asylum in the next General Election or if there is a People's Vote?

Ed. We must lead with strong words on the benefits of immigration, and follow up with 5 top line policies, which should probably be:

- ending the ban on asylum seekers working
- taking more refugees from war torn areas
- closing down most immigration detention centres, and using the money saved to provide high quality community support, to cut visa fees and to strengthen the work of a reformed Border Force to target international criminals involved in people smuggling, especially in relation to abused children and women
- stripping the Home Office of its powers, and transferring responsibilities to other departments - as per our policy
- a series of specific policy changes such as enabling family reunion in all cases and ending the prejudice in the Home Office towards LGBT+ asylum applicants and people escaping persecution for their faith. We should accompany this, with improving access to our full policy papers.

In a People's Vote, the emphasis would of course change somewhat, onto EU citizens, where some of the above wouldn't apply.

The focus should then be on the work EU citizens do - from our NHS to agriculture, from care homes to construction. We should use the many heart-rending cases to help make the emotional case for staying in the EU, taking on directly the nastiness of the Farage approach to using immigration in the 2016 referendum. We should go on the attack!!

Jo. *On immigration - particularly in the context of a People's Vote, I believe we got it wrong last time. Too many people who share our values avoided talking about immigration. I am proud that the Liberal Democrats are pro-immigration and I would shout that from the rooftops. I would do more to raise awareness about all the rich and diverse roles immigrants play in our society from our doctors and nurses to our teachers and neighbours. My message would be that these people are our friends that have chosen Britain as their home and we should welcome them. On asylum I would appeal to Britain's proud history of accepting refugees and remind our friends in other parties of not only their moral duty but their duty under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.*

5. What steps will you take to ensure that the expertise of AO's throughout the party is used more effectively in developing new policies in the policy making process, using existing policies, and developing new one's as circumstances change ? Would you increase, or use more effectively, the resources, especially with the party media, for developing and using policies after they have been agreed by the party. How would you work with organisations within the party, such as LD4SOS?

Jo. You have a wealth of expertise in your network and as Leader I am committed to capitalising on that and using it more effectively. As you know the party has strong, democratic policy making processes that harness the expertise in membership; however, things often move quickly and as Leader I want to ensure that I am able to respond with the best evidence, case studies and information. Therefore, I would hope that my team and I would be able to have a close relationship with you and other AO's to act as a sounding-board and an expert friend.

I have already demonstrated my ability to get media cut through - I have always prided myself on being able to communicate our message clearly and bring out the human story we want to tell. The party has so many good policies in this space but we need to dedicate more resources to making sure people know about them. Liberal Democrats have a lot of momentum at the moment after a very strong showing in both the Local and European Elections, I would capitalise on that not only to continue to campaign to Stop Brexit but to demonstrate to people all the other issues we care deeply about.

Ed. I am a huge fan of the work of many AOs, from LD4SoS to Green Lib Dems - and would be keen to understand what improvements the AOs themselves would like. I want to work closely, within of course the time constraints politics imposes on us all!

I want to open up the party's policy process more widely - using technology - so there is a more active debate about policy online, and party members and AOs can contribute more frequently.

Funding remains a problem - but in general I would want to increase the work of the leader in raising funds for the party across the board, whether that's for our media, campaigning or policy work.

6. What steps would you take to ensure that new policies are developed in a manner which reflects our commitment to the values in the preamble to the party constitution and takes account of external evidence as well as the expertise in the party particularly AOs.

Ed. As much as I can is the answer! But one must note, the Leader is **not** in charge of policy in our democratic party! I would be able to initiate, set a sense of direction and take on a few specific lead issues. I would want to stress to the FPC, that policy must come from our values, and be evidenced-based - which is what I've been arguing for in the leadership campaign so far!!

Jo. Our Constitution is at the forefront of everything I do and our policies must reflect who we are as a party at a fundamental level. I believe as new policy is created we should actively refer back to the Constitution to ensure that it chimes well with the values set out there.

As a party we are so fortunate to have a wealth of expertise in our membership and in our AOs, who also have incredible networks that reach far beyond the party. I have always been evidence-based and would seek to ensure that I actively work with the AOs and experts to improve my own knowledge but also to seek advice and guidance when necessary.