



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

# LD4SOS APRIL 2021 NEWSLETTER

## STOP THE NEW PLAN FOR IMMIGRATION

### The Proposals

The proposals in the New Plan for Immigration represent the most serious attack on the right to claim asylum seen in years. In summary:

- An asylum seeker's means of arrival will determine whether they are entitled to protection in the UK, and the level and length of protection that they enjoy
  - o Applications of those who have passed through 'safe' countries en route to the UK will be considered inadmissible, and the government will seek their rapid removal to that country or to a 'third safe country'
  - o Applicants who do not arrive in the UK via a resettlement programme (or ill-defined exceptional cases) and whose applications are successful will receive a lesser form of protection status, less generous entitlements, and limited rights to family reunion
  - o Introduction of tougher penalties for people facilitating irregular entry into the UK
- The asylum process will become (more) hostile
  - o Individuals may be removed during their claim to an off-shore processing centre (to be agreed with other countries)
  - o Support for asylum seekers whilst waiting a decision will be reduced – in particular accommodation will be provided in basic reception centres
  - o A more robust approach to age assessment for unaccompanied minors
  - o Fast track appeals
- Post-recognition policy changes
  - o Changes to Family Reunion
  - o Indefinite leave to remain and enhanced support to resettled persons
- Identification of victims of modern-day slavery

It is a fundamental tenet of the 1951 Refugee Convention that individuals seeking asylum should have their claims considered fairly and impartially, and that the method of their arrival into a country should not determine how their claim is dealt with. This is because, generally, asylum seekers are not in a position to seek permission in advance to enter a country, and in many cases may not be able to choose which country they end up in. We believe that proper safe and legal routes to claim asylum can and should be created. Introducing a two-tier system of resettlement and welfare support dependent on how an asylum seeker entered the country is cruel and inhumane. It is also counter-productive as it will prevent asylum seekers integrating into the UK and contributing their skills and expertise. You can find out more about the Plan and our concerns on our website [here](#).

### The Consultation

The Government's consultation can be accessed here at [Home Office consultation](#). We want as many people as possible to respond to it. **The consultation period until 6 May** is relatively short, particularly given the complexity of the proposals and the fact that it is taking place over Easter, the Spring Bank Holiday and local elections.

The proposals are dreadful and the consultation process is just as bad. The use of leading questions and language has been criticised by a number of groups.

To the best of our knowledge no attempt has been made to reach out to migrant communities.

It is anticipated that the government will include its proposed legislative changes in the Queen's Speech on 11 May – that's right, 5 days after the end of the consultation.

A big worry, however, is that they will try to push forward some of these changes through secondary legislation which will not require the extensive parliamentary scrutiny of primary legislation.

Help for individuals wishing to respond comes from [Women for Refugee Women](#) and for organisations [from Freedom from Torture](#),

There is also useful information from Asylum Matters [here](#)

Refugee Action have prepared a public statement for organisations to sign which is now being promoted to members of the public as a form of petition against the Plan. For more information please contact [campaign@refugee-action.org.uk](mailto:campaign@refugee-action.org.uk).

Further ammunition from real life experiences may be found in the [open letter by 454 UK immigration scholars](#), rejecting the very notion of 'illegal' journeys, and demonstrating the lack of evidence to support the idea that individuals are making 'bogus' claims for asylum.

Also in [The Independent](#), May Bulman talks to five refugees in Britain highlighting the impact of the government's proposals on them, thus showing how inhumane Priti Patel's proposals are. If the Conservative Government of Edward Heath had not welcomed the Ugandan Asians in the 1970s, Priti Patel would not be here trying to exclude seekers of sanctuary today.

## **THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION**

UNHCR UK have posted on their website [a clear and accessible summary of the 1951 Refugee Convention](#). This is of interest in its own right, as well as when considering your responses to the Government's latest 'tough' and inhumane plans. They have also produced a much snappier video, retweeted on the LD4SOS Twitter feed.

## **A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW TO WELCOME SEEKERS OF SANCTUARY**

The University of Reading is relaunching its [Sanctuary Scholarships Scheme](#), offering up to 12 awards each year, for people with refugee, humanitarian protected or asylum seeker status. We trust the Government will not prevent anyone residing in one of its proposed offshore holding centres from applying to Reading.

## **EVICCTIONS**

For the last year the eviction of asylum seekers whose cases had been refused had been halted due to the pandemic. We were shocked to hear that it now intends to restart this process. These individuals will not have any recourse to public funds (NRPF) and local authorities will not be able to re-house them however vulnerable they might be. Reports from our members suggest these evictions will be happening from the beginning of May. It will be impossible for charities to

rehouse all these individuals and it is currently illegal for kind people to take them into their homes.

Reports in [the Guardian](#) indicate that Public Health England have expressed concern about the increased risk of co-vid that homelessness can create.

[Lib Dem policy](#) is that anyone refused asylum should be able to stay in what is their home until they have completely exhausted all appeal routes but this does not really address the issue of those who have exhausted all those routes and have NRPF.

## **ASYLUM SYSTEM AND MENTAL HEALTH**

On 13 April there was a debate in Westminster Hall, which you can still watch [here](#) to consider a motion which included the statement “Aspects of UK asylum policy and practice have long been criticised by some asylum seekers and their advocates for having a harmful effect on their mental health and psychological wellbeing”.

MPs noted that local surveys had shown that asylum seekers were more likely to have mental health needs than the general population but much less likely to have their condition recognised or treated. The mental health of many asylum seekers is fragile by the time they reach the UK and is worsened by factors such as the stress caused by long waits for decisions (now the longest on record), the damage to self-esteem resulting from the ban on working, and the social isolation experienced particularly when separate from family. Co-vid restrictions had only made life more difficult for people.

Most asylum seekers had been moved into hotel accommodation which sounds good but they were effectively held there as prisoners and sometimes hadn't been allowed to take most of their (few) belongings with them. But some have been held in unsafe and unsanitary conditions in Napier and Penally Barracks (one third of residents in Napier said they felt suicidal). Jamie Stone (Lib Dem MP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) read the following from a lady constituent's letter: “Whilst I appreciate that we must, as a nation, have a care for our own security when considering requests for asylum, this should not mean that Asylum Seekers are ‘Guilty until Proven Innocent’ and then treated worse than convicted criminals in our gaols”. She concludes her letter by criticising the new proposals for immigration, saying: “We have an opportunity and an obligation to shape the future of all our citizens, as well as potential future citizens. Let us strive for better, not worse, conditions and for inclusive, not divisive, policies”. We agree! The motion was carried, but it is up to all of us to ensure things change.

## **UK COUNTRY REPORT**

The latest update of the [United Kingdom Country Report in ECRE's Asylum Information Database \(AIDA\)](#) was published at the end of March 2021. Authored by the Refugee Council, this report gives a comprehensive overview of UK's asylum system, including the legal framework, information on procedures, reception and detention conditions, and what international protection is offered. It outlines changes made to policy throughout the year as well as signalling some changes made at the end of 2020 due to Brexit. It is a really useful for document for anyone studying our system. You can read more from the Refugee Council [here](#).

## DOMESTIC ABUSE BILL

We reported in our last Newsletter that the House of Lords had agreed a number of amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill that would make it easier for migrants to get the protection they needed. Sadly, MPs rejected these amendments namely:

- 40 (stopping data sharing for immigration purposes) after the Government announced an inquiry into data sharing in this context
- 41 (allowing all migrant victims to access domestic violence refugees) after the Government conceded the Support for Migrant Victims Pilot – supporting 500 women in the next year who would otherwise not be able to access support, and to gather evidence of the issue
- 43 (introducing the principle of “non-discrimination” into the Bill as per the Istanbul Convention)

The Bill went back to the House of Lords on 21 April with the Government proposing the House of Lords reject its own amendments!

Peers have now passed new amendments:

- Motion E1 – this would mean that the end of data sharing would only be possible once the government inquiry was complete, with a deadline of July to ensure it has an outcome.
- Motion F1 this would lift the No Recourse to Public Funds conditions for any migrant victims, for the next year (the duration of the Support for Migrants Victims Pilot). This was to ensure that no one missed out on support while the pilot collected evidence.

This represents a success for Lib Dem peers and others who argued for improvements to the Bill. Predictably, these new motions were also voted down in the Commons.

The Government did make one concession in respect to the amendment on data sharing. As well as the previous concession to hold a review into data sharing, it has also now committed to publishing a new “Code of Practice” on data sharing – we will look forward to it!

Please note that the Home Affairs Select Committee has just announced a new inquiry into violence against women and girls, including migrant women. Evidence can be submitted [here](#) by **11<sup>th</sup> May 2021**.

## #CLOSE THE BARRACKS

Despite a serious Covid outbreak and the damning report from CPI the Home Office is continuing to use Napier Barracks and has begun moving people into the facility. We understand it will continue to require people to sleep 28 to a dormitory creating a serious health risk. The High Court is currently hearing claims that the conditions in the barracks continue to be inadequate and unlawful. It seems clear that the Government is intent on developing these large scale institutional reception centres to house people seeking asylum. This must be stopped. Please contact your MP telling them to **#CloseThe Barracks** and continue to sign and share petitions including from 38 Degrees, Freedom from Torture and Hastings Community of Sanctuary.

## NO TO HASSOCKFIELD

The campaign against this proposed detention centre continues. Women for Refugee Women have launched a write to your MP action to oppose the centre. You can find the action [here](#). It is also been raised as an issue with candidates in the mayoral and borough elections.

## **SUZANNE FLETCHER RETIRES FROM LD4SOS COUNCIL**

You may all know that Suzanne was a founding member of LD4SOS in 2013 and her passion and commitment drove its development.

She remains an active member of LD4SOS but has retired from its Council (LD4SOS Executive) to concentrate on other parts of her life supporting seekers of sanctuary locally and fighting the Governments inhumane approach to individuals.

Our Chair, John Skipworth, speaks on behalf of all us saying “On behalf of LD4SOS and the very many Seekers of Sanctuary who have benefitted from your resolution in fighting their corner, thank you for the service you have put in over the years. Suzanne you have been and remain an inspiration to all those who have been touched by you. LD4SOS Council will miss you, be sure of that, but we will try to continue the example you have set.”

We send our very best wishes to Suzanne and her husband John for the future. Knowing they will continue to stand up for asylum seekers and refugees to be treated with compassion, humanity and dignity.

## **THANK YOU TO TONY GREAVES**

Every Liberal Democrat has their personal memories of Tony Greaves and he was very special to LD4SOS.

He was a long standing member of LD4SOS, speaking at our first AGM in 2013. Not only was he a steadfast supporter of LD4SOS but of the most vulnerable members in our society in all aspects of his life. Our tribute to him after his sudden untimely death last month is [here](#)

We were overwhelmed to learn that LD4SOS was one of the organisations that mourners were encouraged to support in lieu of flowers.

We do not want the resulting generous donations we have received to simply go into our general funds but want a more tangible ‘memorial’. We would welcome suggestions from you – please send them to [ld4s0s5@gmail.com](mailto:ld4s0s5@gmail.com) and Chris Brett will be consulting with his family about possibilities.