



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

### LD4SOS JULY 2019 NEWSLETTER

LD4SOS welcomes the election of Jo Swinson as Leader of the Liberal Democrats, and looks forward to working with her as the next Prime Minister in waiting to implement all our good Liberal Democrat policies. The reports below are about campaigning against the actions of the May government. The Johnson government has a brief window of opportunity to reset policy on all these issues.

**CHUKA UMUNNA.** We welcome Chuka Umunna to the Lib Dems and congratulate him on one of his first tweets "*immigration is good for our country and our public services*". We all gain so much from those who have come to the UK for whatever reason.

**WORLD WIDE DISPLACEMENT FIGURES.** The UNHCR [reports here](#) that the number of people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, conflict and persecution has soared to over **70 million** – the highest number seen by the UNHCR in nearly 70 years. Note that of those 85% go to nearby poor and developing countries. **3.5 million are people seeking asylum** – people outside their country of origin and receiving international protection, but awaiting the outcome of their claim to refugee status. Only 26,547 of those came to the UK in 2018-19 – at 0.00008% a literal drop in the ocean.

**PETITION TO REUNITE REFUGEE FAMILIES.** [This petition](#) is on the Refugee Council website. LD4SOS has signed, please sign and encourage others to do.

**RIGHT TO REMAIN TOOLKIT.** Extremely important and useful information in [this toolkit](#) from Right to Remain, for a whole range of scenarios anyone seeking asylum might face. Please do spread this information around to all who work with or support asylum seekers.

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO.** Please do as requested in [this message](#) "Tell your Congolese friends" says, and make sure that anyone from DRC fighting a case, or helping someone to, has access to this important document. Also pass on to other relevant organisations, it could be a life saver if some of the evidence in "Unsafe Return 3" is used.

**ASYLUM AID and DEBRA SINGER.** Well done and thank you to Debra Singer from Asylum Aid for 20 years [campaigning for rights of women asylum seekers](#). Many women have benefitted from improvements fought for, such as childcare in interviews and female interpreters, which she told us about at a fringe meeting in Brighton 3 years ago, and all of which Lib Dems agree with. Thank you from us. You can read more detail about what she said [here](#).

**LIFT THE BAN.** On 17 July, after fantastic work from [local Lift The Ban campaigners](#), Calderdale



Borough Council became the first council in Yorkshire to pass a motion in support of Lift the Ban and join our coalition. The motion was proposed by Councillor Audrey Smith and passed with a strong majority. Congratulations to all involved! Could YOUR Council be next? Here we are with some of the LD4SOS members in Teesside campaigning at a "Lift the Ban" (Right to Work for asylum seekers) writing cards to the Home Secretary, and composing some placards. Our Lib Dem policy [is here](#).

**WORLD REFUGEE DAY.** What better way, says Tim Farron, could the government mark World Refugee Day than by fulfilling the pledge in the “Dubs amendment”, and by implementing [our policy](#), which says that we should expand the scheme to welcome 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children over a period of 10 years. It is good news though that the [Community Sponsorship](#) places will be in addition to the quota, well done campaigners.

**DETENTION.** It is now one year of from the publication of the Shaw Review damning report on Immigration Detention. You can read Detention Action’s [comment on this](#) and we agree with every word of what they say.

Detention Action have asked, [in this letter](#) to Sajid Javid, why nothing has changed, despite promises to do so? LD4SOS have signed the letter, and will support Detention Action if they now write to the new Home Secretary, Priti Patel.

Whilst it is good that G4S are losing the contract for Brook House detention centre and it will be run by the public sector, changing the management is not the answer. We want a massive reduction in the number of detention centres, from 10 to 2.

**SHORT TERM HOLDING FACILITIES.** Ed Davey [has been asking](#) about progress in implementing the recommendations of the independent monitoring boards (IMBs) to improve conditions in short term holding facilities, and how many people were detained for more than 24 hours at the Heathrow and Gatwick facilities. The Minister’s response showed how many, over 27,000. A report on the short term holding facilities at Manchester highlights prison conditions and a lack of privacy that must be addressed. All of these centres are away from the public eye, and we are asking that pressure be put on the Government to do what the IMBs are asking for.

### **NEW SAFEGUARDS FOR WOMEN SEEKING ASYLUM AT RISK OF DOMESTIC ABUSE (DA).**

In 2018 the Refugee Council’s research report with the Asylum Support Appeals Project “Safe from Violence in the UK” highlighted gaps in the protection for women at risk of abuse seeking asylum. Since then the Refugee Council has been working tirelessly to see the report’s recommendations implemented.

In July the Home Office agreed to implement some of the key recommendations in their new DA Guidance – this is the key document their caseworkers use as guidance when responding to disclosures of violence from people seeking asylum.

From now on women seeking asylum will be able to access specialist refuge accommodation if they are experiencing DA. The new guidance crucially commits the Home Office to listening to, and acting on, the views of survivors and their advice workers about what is safe accommodation for them. And, in addition to a number of other improvements, all survivors of DA, irrespective of gender, are covered by this guidance. More information is [here](#).

**NIGERIA.** Will we ever stop being shocked and disgusted at how our Government treats those seeking sanctuary with us? This [Guardian article](#) tells how the Home Office stated in an official document used to determine asylum claims that “*trafficked women from Nigeria can return to the country “wealthy from prostitution” and “held in high regard”*”. Lib Dem policy as in [this link](#) states, amongst other pertinent points “*Use accurate, up-to-date understanding of relevant Country of Origin Information, which must be provided to decision makers.*”

### **CHILDREN.**

[Project 17](#) works with migrant children whose families have “no recourse to public funds” due to their immigration status. Families with children can claim support from local authorities under S17 of the

Children's Act. But this can be difficult to access and S17 is often well below asylum support rates (which are themselves very minimal). Project 17's report tells of the misery suffered by these families who simply don't have enough to live on, and also of the emotional impact on children. They have drawn up a [Children's Charter](#) and made recommendations directed at local authorities about how assessments should be made and support determined, but the more critical recommendations are directed at government.

Both Brian Paddick and Roger Roberts contributed to the debate and highlighted the implications for children of the Government's "hostile environment" immigration policy.

**Roger Roberts** stated that the evidence of the culture of deportation given the slightest discrepancy at the Home Office (HO) is clear from the fact that more than 50% of appeals against immigration decisions continue to be successful.

**Brian Paddick** noted the devastating consequences for children caught up in cases, putting enormous financial strain on local government. He called for asylum seekers to be allowed to work if their case has not been resolved in 6 months.

The Minister refused to accept any of these recommendations.

**Roger Roberts** has also been proactive in raising questions about how the government intends to encourage the integration of asylum seekers into communities (an aim of the Government's Integrated Communities Action Plan); A rapid reduction in outstanding leave to remain cases would help the Government meet its own action plan.

There is an excellent article by **Roger Roberts** about child asylum seekers [on Liberal Democrat Voice](#). It is well worth looking at, the only way to get the full passion and facts!

**UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE CHILDREN.** In the debate on Illegal Seaborne Migration Ed Davey asked about when the government will fulfil its promise to provide a scheme for 480 unaccompanied refugee children. The response was that they had removed the qualifying date altogether, so any child who qualifies and meets UNHCR best interest test can be transferred under the Dubbs agreement. The minister also stated that funding has been increased to £114 per child per night.

**PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM STILL BEING DENIED ACCESS TO JUSTICE.** The APPG on Refugees organised a meeting on access to justice and the immigration legal aid market. It discussed Dr Jo Wilding's [new report](#) "Droughts and Deserts" which looks at this market. The study confirmed that poor quality and inadequate availability of asylum legal aid services is a result of failure to fund adequately the cost of legal advice; many responsible providers unwilling to compromise quality have left the market or moved towards fee paying services in some areas, leaving other providers overwhelmed or less responsible providers who are not adequately controlled. This means some parts of the country have effectively no immigration legal aid provision. They recommended reforms of the immigration legal aid system to reconcile quality, accessibility and financial viability of the service provided, including the creation of a control mechanism that will support high quality providers while sanctioning poor quality ones, and giving consideration to moving away from the standard fee system. It was also argued that reform of legal aid had to be part of broader political change to tackle the hostile environment.

**LEARNING ENGLISH.** Refugee Action has released a new report, '[Turning Words into Action](#)' which highlights the stark contrast between the Government's rhetoric on supporting everyone in the country,

including refugees, to learn English, and the lack of concrete action and new funding needed to achieve this goal. Refugee Action is calling on the Government to create a fund to allow all refugees to receive a minimum eight hours a week of formal, accredited English language teaching for their first two years in the UK, starting from within a month of their arrival in the country or from being granted status. It is [Lib Dem Policy](#) to “ **Provide free basic English lessons to any seeker of sanctuary. We would start these lessons at the earliest opportunity**, so that people would be able to integrate and work in the UK as soon as possible. Also they would then be able to engage, participate and contribute fully to the local community and British society, as so many express the strong desire to do.”

## **ADDING to TRAFFICKING ABUSE.**

**Ed Davey** has said, [after reports](#) that hundreds of child trafficking victims have been refused the right to stay in the UK: “*Theresa May said that modern slavery is the greatest human rights issue of our time, but these revelations show that her government has treated victims appallingly. The Government has a clear moral obligation to support children who have been trafficked to this country and held in slavery. The Conservatives’ failure shames our whole country. The Liberal Democrats demand better protections for vulnerable people. Anyone who has been a victim of modern slavery should be given the support they need, not treated like criminals by the hostility in the Home Office.*”

**Wera Hobhouse** [criticised the government’s refusal](#) to put a firewall between the police, labour inspection agencies and the Home Office for immigration purposes, which means that victims of modern slavery will continue to be at risk of detention and deportation. She called on the minister to finally accept that data sharing for immigration enforcement purposes must stop. We must not deter trafficked people from coming forward.

In the Lords, **Brian Paddick** [spoke out](#) about it not just being the victims of modern slavery but survivors of rape and other serious sexual assaults whose details are being passed to immigration officials by the police, with a view to deporting those who are undocumented migrants.

**THE DETENTION OF CHINESE WOMEN TRAFFICKED TO THE UK.** Women for Refugee Women released [new research](#) finding that the Home Office is harming vulnerable Chinese women who have been trafficked to the UK by routinely locking them up for long periods of time in detention. Chinese women currently make up the largest group by nationality of women in Yarl’s Wood detention centre. The [report](#) shows that the Home Office is detaining women who are encountered in exploitative situations – including women who are picked up in brothels and massage parlours – and ignoring the clear indicators that they are trafficked. This is contrary to the Home Office’s own guidance. The report calls on the UK Government to act now to ensure that survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence are never detained, by immediately implementing the stated presumption against their detention. It also states that the Home Office needs to end its use of immigration detention completely.

**HOME OFFICE ACCUSED OF DELIBERATELY LYING TO DEPORT SLAVERY VICTIMS** There have been reports that the Home Office had lied in order to deport victims of human trafficking and modern slavery to other EU countries. The idea that officials have been deliberately lying in order to deport unlawfully victims of trafficking and modern slavery is sickening. We say that there must be a full and independent investigation of these allegations immediately, and any victims must be returned to the UK.

**This is yet more evidence that the Home Office is not fit for purpose. The Liberal Democrats will strip it of its powers over immigration and asylum and set up a new, arms-length body to process applications fairly and lawfully.**

**HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.** [In a debate](#) on the under resourcing of Borders and Immigration Staff, Brian Paddick made the point that the real problem is the continuation of the Hostile Environment, with the haste to reduce immigration numbers by deporting people for even the most minor of reasons.

**HOMELESS REFUGEES.** The latest “Mind the Gap” [report](#) from NACCOM (The No Accommodation Network) reports on shocking levels of homelessness and destitution among new refugees – those who have recently got leave to remain in the UK. It recommends forcefully that they be given 56 days to find a home, job and money instead of what is now less than 28 days. This is already @LibDem policy [here](#).

**LGBT ISSUES.** The Government record of treatment of LGBT asylum seekers [was attacked](#) by Paul Scriven & Baroness Hamwee in the House of Lords as the words used are not matching actions, and there are too many wrong decisions.

**Chuka Umunna** spoke out, as recorded here in [Pink News](#) at Gay Pride in London, about the ridiculously high levels of proof needed for asylum claims based on a person being gay. Our Lib Dem Policy [on decision-making](#) challenges this, and there is a lot more detail in our amendment passed at the September 2018 conference: [here](#). *“Review and reform all aspects of current asylum rules and operations that offend basic fairness and justice, doing away with the culture of disbelief, and 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”.*

**HEATHROW AIRPORT & HARMONDSWORTH AND COLNBROOK.** Heathrow Expansion Consultation started on 18 June and the consultation document includes the proposed location for the new Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) which will be between East Bedfont and Hatton in the London Borough of Hounslow. The preferred location is on the Airport Business Park site off Faggs Road in Hounslow close to Hatton Cross tube station. It will have space to hold 1000 people and be completed by 2026. Detailed plans have not been released and the exact site is not clear. Consultation ends on 13<sup>th</sup> September. End Heathrow Immigration Detention (EHID) is campaigning that there is no replacement IDC and that the government commits to closing the two existing ones permanently. You can see LD4SOS’s briefing paper on the issue [here](#); EHID’s website is [here](#); Heathrow consultation site is [here](#).



**ALL HANDS.** One of our LD4SOS Council is the winner of a photo competition at a NE City of Sanctuary meeting. They were asked to produce a photo reflecting what City of Sanctuary was about, and here it is. Every shade, young and old.