



Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

LIFE AS AN ASYLUM SEEKER

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Housing, on a no choice basis, is provided for asylum seekers in what are called “dispersal areas” in the UK. It can be a house, flat, hostel or B & B.

Rent, utility bills, and council tax are paid. Currently, payments of weekly benefit for people to live on, to include food, clothes, toiletries etc is via a debit card called the Aspen Card.

Financial support provided is £37.75 for each person in the household, and is loaded onto the Aspen Card each week. This card can be used to get cash from a cash machine, or used anywhere that takes a debit card. The withdrawals on this card are monitored by the Home Office so they know where a person is and what they are spending money on.

A number of asylum seekers are on what is called “Section 4”. They would be otherwise destitute having been refused asylum but are making a fresh appeal or are not able to return to their country of origin immediately due to circumstances beyond their control. They are given housing and less money to live on, £35.59 per person. The money is paid via an Aspen Card too, but they are unable to draw cash and can only use it in places with a card terminal. This means they have no cash for spending money in a market, a small shop selling ethnic food, bus fares and things like haircuts.

Liberal Democrat new policy is to provide the same level and less intrusive type of support to all seekers of sanctuary.

It is not right to treat unsuccessful applicants differently to those whose application is still being considered because their basic needs are the same.

We would also launch a review into the current low level of support with a view to raising it to ensure that it is enough to live on. When first introduced the payment was 70% of income support levels (it was less to take into account housing costs not having to be paid), but it has now dropped to 52%.

It is possible that reduced support payments and the tax revenue raised by allowing seekers of sanctuary to work would more than pay for such a rise. But irrespective of that it is the right thing to do.

We restate support for our existing policy that support rates should go up in line with benefits.

Also we believe that all asylum seekers should have the right to work, if they wish, 3 months after applying for asylum and be required to work (but only if they are able to) 6 months after applying for asylum. It would give them dignity, the ability to use their skills and they would be better able to find a job when given the right to remain.

HOUSING

Liberal Democrats would rewrite all future government-tendered contracts for asylum-seekers’ housing to ensure:

- that a local authority or group of local authorities can compete for them;
- that housing conditions which compromise human dignity, such as forced bedroom sharing for unrelated adults, will be grounds for termination
- that existing specific laws on rental housing standards will be fully applicable.

Every effort will be made to terminate any current contracts that do not meet these last two conditions.

Housing contracts will be monitored more effectively with more accountability and transparency in their work. 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 have to share bedroom space.