



## Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary

23 Lincoln Road, Hindley, Wigan. WN2 3QY

johnskipworth038@btinternet.com (correspondence)

[info@ld4sos.org.uk](mailto:info@ld4sos.org.uk)

[www.ld4sos.org.uk](http://www.ld4sos.org.uk)

[facebook.com/ld4sos](https://facebook.com/ld4sos)

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President Lord Roger Roberts of Llandudno

### REFUGEE FAMILY REUNION POLICY

The absence of safe and legal routes into Europe to seek asylum inevitably leads to individuals fleeing their countries by themselves, and subsequently wishing to be reunited with their families whom they had left behind. Seekers of Sanctuary granted asylum in the UK have a legal right under both UK and humanitarian law to sponsor their close family to come and live here. But the definition of “close family” is very restrictive and the processes are disproportionately complex. Although the rules have the capacity to be flexible in cases with compassionate and compelling circumstances, this happens increasingly rarely. In September 2018 the Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration reiterated his concerns about the effectiveness of the decision-making processes.

The Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill was taken through the Lords by Sally Hamwee; Brexit overtook any chance Tim Farron might have had to pursue it in the Commons. Sally has a similar Private Member’s Bill this session, due for a second reading debate in May. Sadly there seems no prospect of the Government acceding to it.

#### LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WOULD:

- Extend the definition of family member in relation to the applicant seeking reunification (who may be the sponsor or the family member applying to join the sponsor) to incorporate their spouse, their civil or unmarried partner, their children aged under 18, their grandchildren under 18, their unmarried child aged 18 or over, their parent, their sibling under the age of 18, their niece or nephew under the age of 18 or any other dependent relative not listed here.
- Agree that for applicants who are under the age of 18 and neither of whose parents is known to be alive or able to reach the United Kingdom, a family member also means an aunt or uncle.
- Recognise as eligible family members relatives of half-blood as well as full blood.
- Have a presumption in favour of family reunification except in those rare cases where it is not in the interests of the child, and seek to improve the arrangements where unification is deemed to be interests of the child.

#### LIBERAL DEMOCRATS WILL ALSO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SYSTEM AS A WHOLE WHICH WILL FACILITATE FAMILY REUNION (from Policy paper 131, “A Fair Deal for Everyone: Prosperity and Dignity in Migration”) INCLUDING

- Establish a dedicated unit for dealing with asylum applications (including for family reunion) which will work with the Department for International Development, with the aim of improving the speed and quality of decision-making without the threat of any political interference. We would invest heavily in the recruitment, training and development, including the emotional intelligence, of staff so that they can process applications quickly and accurately.
- Move towards a caseworker model that helps applicants navigate the system.
- Ensure an effective review and arbitration process to allow any decision apparently taken outside the rules to be rectified before reaching appeal.
- Restore the arrangements for legal aid for seekers of sanctuary that existed before the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012.