

COUNCIL

25 NOVEMBER 2020

ITEM NO: 15

TITLE: “Sanctuary”

PROPOSING COUNCILLORS: David Gardner, Miranda Williams, Averil Lekau, Sarah Merrill, Chris Lloyd, Christine May, Mark James, Anthony Okereke, John Fahy, Matthew Morrow, Mariam Lolavar, Denise Scott-McDonald, David Stanley, Ivis Williams, Linda Bird, Ann-Marie Cousins, Adel Khaireh, Olu Babatola, Dominic Mbang, Norman Adams

This Council reaffirms its commitment to being a welcoming home and sanctuary to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and upholds the principles of dignity and respect for all. The current pandemic has underlined the huge role that migrants have played in the NHS, care and other frontline services too often paying the ultimate sacrifice to protect Britain from harm and save lives. In particular, we mourn the tragic loss of four NHS professionals in our Lewisham and Greenwich Trust.

In an age of growing xenophobia with the globalisation of the far right from Trump to Orban, UK Hostile Environment policies have blurred the distinction between service provision and immigration enforcement with the most vulnerable having no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and being left destitute. Recognising our history and ethos of welcoming refugees over many decades and our enduring commitment to diversity and inclusion:

This Council commits to:

1. Flying the “City of Sanctuary” flag on World Refugee Day and to work with the local organisations towards becoming a Royal Borough of Sanctuary.
2. Encouraging our residents to exercise their existing rights in conjunction with excellent local advice organisations, ensuring continued routine access to interpreters and immigration advice.
3. Continue to work with community networks to provide practical support to those in despair and destitution
4. Review the advantages and concerns around an embedded Home Office secondee examining different practices in other local authority NRPF teams, taking account of the reduction to a part-time position and the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations.

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5. Working towards all residents being able to access voluntary and statutory services to meet their basic healthcare, housing, and income needs including further support vulnerable groups by continuing to investigate rogue landlords.
6. Improving access to employment continuing to support English as a Second Language courses helping migrants to access employment opportunities through LSEC and other providers. We continue to be committed to improving understanding of the career paths available, and focused advice for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic candidates through GLLaB and with local Universities.

And asks the Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary asking the government to:

1. Implement the recommendations of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into detention, end the shameful practice of “indefinite detention” and work towards the closure of all detention centres.
2. Honour its commitment to the “Dubs amendment” and reopen the scheme to provide sanctuary to 10,000 child refugees over the next ten years (3-5 per local authority) and properly fund local authorities to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
3. End NRPF policies and reverse attacks on access to the NHS.
4. Extend the equal right to vote to all UK residents, regardless of citizenship and grant asylum seekers the right to take paid work while their application is being determined.
5. Develop clear policies so public service providers (schools, NHS etc.) are not part of the ‘Hostile Environment’ by, for example, providing data to be used for detention and deportation.